

Abstract: "'Travel, Behold and Wonder': Fashionable
Images of the Wilderness in Upstate New York,
1800-1850"

by

William Clinton Saunders
Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1979

Although the wilderness preservation movement has emerged as a political force relatively recently, man's desire for retreat and renewal in untamed wilderness environments has a rich history in North America. Using contemporary guidebooks, diaries and journals, this study examines the early nineteenth century "Fashionable Tour" from New York City to Niagara Falls and combines description of the most important "natural wonders" en route with an analysis of their cultural meaning and value. There are two major themes. (1) Although pompous religiousness of language suggests conventional religiosity, pilgrims were overwhelmed with feelings of reverence, awe and wonder when face to face with natural wonders. (2) The extravagance of the New World's natural wonders influenced American and European images of the American experiment.

Romanticism and Scottish Common Sense Realism are the intellectual and aesthetic background for this study. After some preliminary observations and definitions, I review the widespread importance of these two movements in early America and their points of contact with American sensibilities. Significant iconological moments in the lives of three leading Americans -- John Bartram, Samuel

Mitchill and Timothy Dwight -- who donned their tourist habits to visit the Catskill Mountains, illustrate both the diversity of these influences and the beginnings of the Fashionable Tour.

Analysis of the tour itself begins with chapter three. From their steamboat, tourists divided the Hudson River Valley into five "reaches" symbolizing grandeur (the Palisades), repose (Tappan Sea), sublimity (the Highlands), picturesqueness (the Hillsides) and beauty (the Catskills). In the first four reaches (chapter 3), the sublime Highlands dominate the landscape. But the "view from the top" and Kaaterskill Falls at Pine Orchard in the Catskills were the most significant natural wonders in the Hudson Valley.

Chapter five introduces Part II: West to Niagara Falls. The overwhelming effect of ongoing European settlement on the wilderness -- on flora, fauna and native Americans -- differentiates the unpredictable trip west from the predictable trip north. At Albany, tourists left their luxurious steamboats and transferred to stagecoaches and/or canalboats. Cohoes Falls, Little Falls and especially Trenton Falls, N. P. Willis' "Rural Resort," highlight the journey from Albany to Utica and suggest greater wonders to come. Images of the wilderness west of Utica comprise chapter seven. "Soft" pastoral landscapes, as in the Finger Lakes Region, did not arouse the intense response that major wonders such as the "view from the top" and Trenton Falls did.

Niagara Falls was the climax and conclusion of the pilgrimage. The "greatest natural wonder" known and accessible to early nineteenth century tourists, Niagara elicited a torrent of enthusiasm and verbiage. After a detailed examination of tourist expectations and anticipations, descriptions and dreams, I focus specifically on the religious sentimentality which laced images of Niagara Falls. Pilgrims, responding with awe and protestations of "indescribability," found evidence to support their popular religiosity. The trip from New York to Niagara was not just a relaxed holiday, but a highly focussed pilgrimage for persons seeking mystery and majesty in the sublime and the beautiful. Niagara, and to a lesser extent the other natural wonders along the Hudson and across New York State, became religious shrines in early nineteenth century America.

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Chapter 1:
European Elements in
American Iconology

My country! 'tis of thee,
 Sweet land of liberty--
 Of thee I sing:
 Land, where my fathers died;
 Land of the pilgrim's pride;
 From every mountain-side
 Let freedom ring.

My native country! thee--
 Land of the noble free--
 Thy name I love:
 I love thy rocks and rills,
 Thy woods and templed hills;
 My heart with rapture thrills,
 Like that above.

Let music swell the breeze,
 And ring from all the trees
 Sweet freedom's song. . . .

Early in 1832, Lowell Mason (1792-1872), one of America's foremost hymnologists and church musicians, asked a twenty-four year old student for the Baptist ministry to translate several German "music books and songs" into English.¹ A few weeks later, Samuel Francis Smith (1808-1891) sent Mason "some translations and other poems; this must have chanced to be among them. . . .To my surprise I found later that he had incorporated it into a programme for the celebration of July 4, 1832, at Park Street Church, Boston."² The casual way in which important historical events sometimes occur is suggested

¹Samuel Francis Smith, Poems of Home and Country, Also Sacred and Miscellaneous Verse edited by Henry G. Carrington (Boston: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1895), p. xvii. Lowell Mason was appointed in charge of music at three major Boston churches in 1827. His choir at Bowdoin Street Church "earned national reputation for the quality of its singing." See further William Jensen Reynolds, A Survey of Christian Hymnody (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), pp. 93ff.

²Ibid.

by Smith's "surprise" that a poem he had composed was to be sung at the Boston Sabbath School Union's celebration of the young nation's Independence.

Some events are predictably important. Understandably, historians have tended to focus on them. American historiography often amounts to a chronology and interpretation of events easily identified by the contemporary press and amply documented for posterity. The solemn signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the early celebrations of that event were recorded in detail and with reverence.

By 1832, however, the annual Fourth of July celebration on Boston Common had become a day for irreverent fun and frolic, prompting the recently organized, less playful Boston Sabbath School Union to stage a rather obscure counter-celebration. Yet the very unpredictability of its subsequent importance heightens its curiosity. Samuel Francis Smith had no warning that his song was to be sung on July 4, 1832 in Boston, nor did he have any premonition that his words, to a tune usually credited to Henry Carey (d. 1743), would be cherished by Americans. While Smith did not "propose to write a national anthem, he had done so,"³ for the sentiments which Smith expressed

³Ibid. "The Star Spangled Banner," written by Francis Scott Key in September, 1814, declined in popularity after a spurt of enthusiasm immediately after it was written. The impetus for its recognition as the National Anthem by Act of Congress, March 3, 1931, appears to have been Woodrow Wilson's order that it be played at all military services in 1916.

in the poem he called "America" caught the national imagination. In a short time his words were widely known in the new nation.⁴ Why?

Beside the fact that the tune is easily sung, the poem combines two themes that we now understand to be deeply embedded in nineteenth century American life and culture: 1) the noble sacrifice of revolutionary heroes for their country's freedom from foreign domination and 2) the unique qualities of the untamed wilderness. My concern in this study is with the second theme. Smith captured in mood and in rhyme a growing national sentiment which revered the New World landscape as evidence of both God's glorious beneficent creation and America's unique position in the galaxy of nations. Mountains, rocks, rills, woods, trees and hills had become sources of national inspiration and spiritual renewal for a people contemplating their special destiny. The hills were no longer foreboding crags as in the colonial days. In the Catskills one had been "templed" -- crowned with a "Yankee palace" -- for the pleasure of weary, yet exuberant travellers who sacrificed time and energy to witness fashionably sublime and beautiful vistas. And that was only a first stop for many pilgrims travelling to the "greatest natural wonder in the world," Niagara Falls.

⁴Smith's hymn must not be confused with what is today usually called America the Beautiful, with music by Samuel A. Ward (1843-1903) and words by Katherine Lee Bates (1850-1903). The Ward/Bates effort begins "Oh, beautiful for spacious skies. . . ."

Nineteenth century "structures of feeling" which institutionalized such enthusiasm for sublime and beautiful natural wonders we view now with nostalgia. Our perceptions have changed. The mystique of the Catskill Mountain House, the first "temple" of the Catskills, faded after World War I. It was abandoned in 1942, declared a public danger and burned to the ground by the New York State Department of Conservation in 1963. Similarly, Niagara Falls has been abandoned to commercial interests and honeymooners. Awe for America's natural wonders, such as that held by the clientele of "the House" and pilgrims to "the Falls", has also diminished as has a feeling for the sentiment expressed in the last line of verse two: "My heart with rapture thrills/Like that above." Yet for many travellers of the early nineteenth century, the "natural wonders" of the American wilderness were considered glorious evidence of the greatness and beneficence of the Creator. By default, the American wilderness became a link between the glorification of America's unique place and destiny and reverence for the Creator's goodness and beauty. As Smith humbly put it.

When it [the hymn] was composed, I
was profoundly impressed with the
necessary relation between the love⁵
of God and love of country.

In retrospect, the identification of these basic themes appears relatively straightforward. But their

⁵Smith, op. cit.

explanation and interpretation is complicated by the necessity to penetrate to the core of changing and often conflicting national moods and rhythms. Yet in spite of this complexity, I sense that Wallace Stevens was profoundly correct in observing that "we live in the description of a place, not in the place itself." Robert Bellah's work in "Civil Religion" -- analyzing the myths "of place" which often have very little to do with "the place itself" -- is partly in response to Stevens' deceptively simple piece of wisdom. My focus lies somewhere between "a place" and "the place itself," between the Ideal and the Actual. By investigating images -- prose descriptions, poems, paintings and songs -- of specific geophysical realities, we can better understand the dilemma of place insofar as it is reflected in feelings about the American landscape.⁶

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the ways in which those who visited the "natural wonders" of New York State during the first half of the nineteenth century understood these examples of the American wilderness. Two themes run through this study. First, the experiences of tourists touched a spiritual yearning in their lives. While pompous religiousness of

⁶Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (editors), American Civil Religion (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 256. This collection of essays is the result of the Drew University Symposium on Civil Religion, and Bellah's essay is a response to papers collected in the volume. Of the several types of images, I have concentrated on prose for reasons of manageability.

language bespeaks a popular conventionality, tourists anticipated more than a vacation in making the long and uncomfortable pilgrimage to the "natural wonders" of upstate New York. While stories of cheap thrills are legion, the great majority of average tourists described their longing for immersion in and peace with the sublime and the beautiful using language which at worst is merely sentimental, but which at best may be called religious. Tourists were not on a passive retreat from their everyday lives; they were on an active search for the sublime and the beautiful. Second, an awareness of the mood of reverence for American "natural wonders" contributes to an understanding of the national sensitivities and rhythms of the early nineteenth century.

The physical fact of wilderness has been, for most of our history, an overwhelming environmental reality. From the first European settlement to the present day, the experience has elicited reactions as different as those who experienced it directly from the front door of their primitive log cabin or from those who now see its wonders in coffee table books while reclining in their urbane easy chairs. Our utilization of the wilderness has run the gamut from unabashed economic exploitation to preservation from human intrusion. Furthermore, as Smith's poem implies, the beauty and the abundance of the American wilderness came to be associated with the vitality of the American experiment in tolerance and freedom. At the same time, Americans used the natural landscape for their

economic benefit in ways which spoiled the very qualities of beauty and abundance for which it was revered. This is exemplified in the history of the American west. An image of the trans-Mississippi west familiar to every American schoolchild served to draw the curious and the adventure-seeking from the east.⁷ Yet the increase in population compromised both the initially attractive image and the wilderness reality. Clearly, in a day when the cries of "back to nature" are heard throughout the nation, partly in response to the rapid disappearance of wilderness areas in an overcrowded, urban and technological age, it must be remembered that such cries have been heard before. Affection for untamed nature is not a new phenomenon in American history.

We begin our consideration of the background of nineteenth century white American images of the wilderness with the European conquistadores and explorers who invaded these shores for "gold, glory and the gospel" in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁸ The Renaissance seaman, whether English or Spanish, Francis

⁷For the best account of images of the trans-Mississippi west, see Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land, The American West as Symbol and Myth (New York: Vintage Books, 1957).

⁸Of course, the white Europeans were not the first to interact with the American wilderness. Native American Studies reveal the ways various tribes related to their particular wilderness environment, be it midwestern prairie or northeastern woods. But while the native American images of the wilderness are rich and fascinating, they are of little direct relevance to this study.

Drake or Hernán Cortés, represented a considerably different element of European culture than those who succeeded in establishing a permanent base at Massachusetts Bay in 1620. Louis B. Wright characterized the "actors in the great scenes of Renaissance exploration and discovery" as

romantics inspired by an intense passion for honor and glory, hungry also for the material wealth which would permit the trappings and display that were the visible evidences of glory in the Renaissance. This desire for glory and wealth, combined with a zeal to serve God as well as the earthly sovereign, led to incredible heroics that at times seemed mystically inspired. These qualities were confined to no single nation or people. A phlegmatic Dutchman or a taciturn Englishman might on occasion demonstrate the same romantic dash as the most volatile Latin. 9

While the "motivations of the explorers and conquerors were complex and are sometimes hard for modern man to understand,"¹⁰ this should not blind us to the profundity and the genuineness with which the explorers believed their beliefs and pursued their goals. Yet precisely this limited their vision of the American wilderness. They viewed it through their European perspectives: as a source of gold for the royal treasuries back home or as an arena for self-glorification and fame. The Mediterranean Renaissance imposed a pattern on the report of new

⁹Louis B. Wright, Gold, Glory and the Gospel (New York: Antheneum, 1970), p. xiv. Wright's use of the term "romantic" should not be confused with my use of the term "romanticism." Wright wants to signify adventure, heroic courage, bravery, and daring in his use of the term.

¹⁰Ibid., p. x.

discoveries, for its conventions allowed certain images of the New World. The New World became a setting for testing Utopian theories which often had nothing to do with the New World itself. Furthermore, attitudes towards gold and glory often brutalized these Utopian theories resulting in an "anti-image" of the New World as a place of natural cruelty. Tales of bloodshed, vicious human behavior and the hoarding of wealth were innocently carried back home by explorers, encouraging negative images of the New World. During this period, the old saw that the "love of money is the root of all evil" was vindicated, for the greed for gold tarnished images that the New World gathered during the first fifty years of the conquistador period.

The British experience was slightly different. John Cabot, one of the first Englishmen to probe the seas of North America, centered his hope on a discovery of a Northwest Passage. The unrelenting search for a Northwest Passage during the three centuries following the initial voyage of 1496 meant that for many Englishmen who vicariously pursued personal glory in founding a British Empire, the North American wilderness was simply an obstruction to further glory. The dreams and visions of the early European explorers of America were dreams and visions of the Old World, not of a New World - a problem of perspective which has been an important problem of American culture ever since.

While the early explorers did not consider the New World on its own terms, the situation of the early Massachusetts settlers was significantly different. It is not possible to exaggerate the importance of the wilderness for the sensibilities and anxieties of the early colonists. The mission of those who settled in Massachusetts Bay has appropriately been termed an "Errand into the Wilderness,"¹¹ for such a label identifies the raw, physical environment of the much-heralded errand. Cotton Mather perhaps best characterized the essential Puritan attitude towards the wilderness in observing that

The New-Englanders are a People of God settled in those, which were once Devils territories; and it may be easily supposed that the Devil was Exceedingly disturbed, when he perceived such a people were accomplishing the Promise of old made unto our Blessed Jesus, That He should have the Utmost parts of the Earth for his Possession. . . . The Devil thus Irritated, immediately try'd all sorts of Methods to overturn this poor Plantation: and so much of the Church, as was Fled into this Wilderness, immediately found, The Serpent cast out of his Mouth a Flood for the Carrying of it away. 12

¹¹This is the title of a book by Perry Miller, Errand into the Wilderness (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956). Studies subsequent to Miller's collection of essays under the above title have tended to focus on the nature of the errand rather than on the wilderness context itself. Two dissertations recently completed are suggestive; Peter Neil Carroll, "Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier, 1629-1675" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1968) and Charles Francis Carroll, "The Forest Civilization of New England: Timber, Trade and Society in the Age of Wood, 1600-1688" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1970).

¹²Cotton Mather, The Wonders of the Invisible World (London: no publisher given, 1862), p. 13. This volume was first published in 1693.

Even modern authors have incorporated the early Puritan fear of the wilderness into modern drama. Arthur Miller, hardly noted as an historian, speaks of the wilderness experience in introducing his play, The Crucible.

The edge of the wilderness was close by. The American continent stretched endlessly west and it was full of mystery. . . .It stood, dark and threatening, over their shoulders night and day. . . .the Salem folk believed that the Virgin forest was the Devil's last preserve, his home base and the citadel of his final stand. To the best of their knowledge the American forest was the last place on earth that was not paying 13
homage to God.

John M. Anderson has summarized the attitudes of the early explorers of the New World and the first settlers.

Where the more worldly settlers and explorers of the New World were misled and misguided in their efforts to exploit the new land by their Old World ideals and hopes, the Puritans were freed from any inclination to an illusory and wishful interpretation of the New World by their transcendent idealism; they knew a priori that the New World was indeed the very antithesis of their ultimate hopes, the very abode of the Devil himself, and sure to be the source of all 14
their temptations.

But the vision changed, not under the guidance of the Puritan divines, but in response to the realities of commercial growth and an increasing accumulation of property and material goods. The wilderness was not only a Devil's territory, but also an exploitable natural resource.

¹³ Arthur Miller, Collected Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1957, p. 227. The quotation is from the author's introduction to The Crucible.

¹⁴ John M. Anderson, The Individual and the New World: A Study of Man's Existence Based upon American Life and Thought (State College, Pennsylvania: Bald Eagle Press, 1955), pp. 5-6.

And the religious asceticism of early New-Englanders encouraged the revised image, for it led inevitably to the accumulation of property. John Wesley stated the dilemma well.

'I fear, wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion. . . .For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. . . .The Methodists in every place grow diligent and frugal; consequently they increase in goods. Is there no way to prevent this--this continual decay of pure religion? We ought not to prevent people from being diligent and frugal; we must exhort all Christians to gain all they can, and to save all they can; that is, in effect, to grow 15 rich.'

The Puritans discovered, in contradicting some of their revered religious leaders, that there was some good to be found in their immediate environment. In that discovery, they sowed the seeds of appreciation for the untamed American wilderness, an appreciation which developed gradually through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Another dimension of the change in attitudes of those living in New England found its source in the Puritan preoccupation with vernacular detail and thoroughness. The "Meditations" of Edward Taylor (1642-1729), poetic reflections on Biblical texts written in conjunction with sermons, record with a marvelous warmth and tenderness

¹⁵Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism Translated by Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 175.

his intimacy with the things of nature. While Taylor does not mention specific scenes or natural objects of the wilderness environment in which he lived, the crude language and vernacular imagery of the "Meditations" is a change in tone from the elaborate neo-classical verse prevalent among the cultural elite of the day. For Taylor, words never became detached from things. Using the image of fire, Taylor reflects on the ease of succumbing to "worldly toys" in Meditation 42 on Hebrews 10:5.

But oh! if thou one Sparke of heavenly fire
 Wilt but drop on my hearth; it holy flame
 Will burn my trash up, and refin'de desire¹⁶
 Will rise to thee in th'Curlings of the same.

The rustic situation of his life is critically, yet affectionately portrayed in his frustration with language as a vehicle for praise.

Words are befould, Thoughts filthy fumes that smoake,
 From Smutty Huts, like Will-a-Wisps that rise
 From Quagmires, run ore bogs where frogs do Croake,
 Lead all astray led by them by the eyes.
 My muddy Words so dark thy Deity,
 And cloud thy Sun-Shine, and its Shining Sky.¹⁷

In spite of the filthy and smutty character of human language, Taylor has "no finer Stuff to use." "Bogs where frogs do Croake" should not be confused with Paradise (a confusion made by many later theologians of American nationalism), but like words, cannot be easily rejected

¹⁶Edward Taylor, Christographia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 3.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 35.

or ignored. Muddy nature is not yet a manifestation of Divine Beauty, but it nevertheless is a resource for humankind, just as words, if not "for thy Glorious Selfe to beautify," are a vehicle for man's "Greed but to declare."

Taylor comes closer to positing nature as a manifestation of Divine Beauty in Meditation 56:

Nature doth better work than Art: yet thine 18
Outvie both works of nature and Art.

While it would be improper to identify Edward Taylor as a precursor of nineteenth century enthusiasm for the American landscape, it is important to observe that the natural world was, for him, an object of affection and was not rejected merely as the abode of the Devil.

Sometime during the later years of Taylor's life (about 1713), young Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) wrote a short essay entitled "The Flying Spider." This spider did not dangle in the mouth of hell; it aroused Edwards' childhood curiosity. Because he pursued a "series of exact observations and discoveries as to the facts themselves; to search out their causes; and as a result of the whole, to draw up and present a lucid, systematic and well-digested report of his investigations" of the flying spider, Edwards has been called a "youthful naturalist."¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 436.

¹⁹ Egbert C. Smith (ed.), "The Flying Spider -- Observations by Jonathan Edwards When a Boy" Andover Review, January 1890. Reprinted. p. 1.

Young boys tend to be curious, but Edwards' curiosity was insatiable. I. N. Tarbox confirmed this in a paper given at the Edwards Reunion in 1870 in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

This boy, untaught by books, unprompted by others, saw and comprehended what none before him had seen, and what few have the eyes to see, even though the whole process has been described. ²⁰

In responding to Edwards' report on the flying spider, A. S. Packard (1798-1884) goes so far as to say that "Edwards was a natural observer" who "in another age or under other training . . . might have been a naturalist or natural philosopher."²¹

Regardless of how we view Edwards' effort, the precision and delicacy of observation and the desire to understand the details of America's natural landscape indicate a change from the previous sentiment which had attempted to block out or ignore the wilderness reality. While the roots of acceptance and appreciation were perhaps more generally watered by the development of commercial and business interests, an appreciation for the natural world was not unknown among the Puritan divines whose official stance, like Cotton Mather's, was

²⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

²¹ Ibid., p. 3. A. S. Packard was associated with Brown University from 1824 to 1884 as Professor of Latin and Greek, Collins Professor of Natural and Revealed Religion, College Librarian and Acting President.

that the wilderness was the abode of the Devil.²²

A third New England divine suggests another type of appreciation which became widespread during the nineteenth century. In 1784, Jeremy Belknap, minister in Dover, New Hampshire, made an extended tour of the White Mountains. Enthusiastic impressions of the general landscape were recorded in his three volume History of New Hampshire.²³ Belknap was one of the first Americans to recommend "the thick wilderness, . . . wild and rugged scenes, . . . aged mountains, stupendous elevations, impending rocks, verdant woods . . . and the roaring torrent" to the "contemplative mind."²⁴ Belknap also

²²Of course, the Old Testament imagery of wilderness and paradise permeated the sensibilities of old New England, especially among the educated and particularly the clergy. A sketch of the Biblical images of the wilderness on colonial sensibilities is contained in George Hunston Williams, Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought: The Biblical Experience of the Desert in the History of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), chapter IV, pp. 98-131. However, my concern as will become apparent, is not the theological use made of Biblical imagery in the New World, but rather the ways in which Americans looked at and saw the real "natural wonders" presented to them by the American landscape. Much work needs to be done on the ways in which Biblical images of the wilderness affected American (and particularly Puritan) life. A number of themes could be considered such as the untamed American west as promised land motif and the American wilderness as the home of the devil motif. My concern, however, is with the immediate sources of the images of specific geographical features in upstate New York.

²³Jeremy Belknap, The History of New Hampshire (Philadelphia and Boston: 1784, 1791, 1792). The first volume was published in Philadelphia and the latter two in Boston. These volumes were republished in 1813 by Bradford and Reed, Boston.

²⁴Ibid., (1813 Edition), Vol. II, pp. 31ff.

visited New York State, the geographical focus of this study. In a "Tour from Boston to Oneida, June 1791, with Dr. Morse," Belknap viewed the "Kaats-kill Mountain . . . that lie beyond the Hudson, and appear very majestic."²⁵ Cohoes Falls were similarly "majestic," although Belknap reverts to an emphasis on detail in describing the "black, shelly rock," the height of the Falls and the depth of the water.²⁶ At breakfast one morning, Belknap noted the "beautiful eminence, commanding a pleasant prospect."²⁷

Belknap's enthusiasm reveals a change in attitude towards the wilderness. During the later years of the eighteenth century, two "structures of consciousness" penetrated the New World and deserve scrutiny as background for the expanding mood of appreciation during the nineteenth century. First, the movement towards Independence spurred the acceptance of a nascent European Romanticism as a structure for understanding the magnificence and uniqueness of the American wilderness. Romanticism found its way to these North American shores.²⁸ Second, Scottish Common Sense aesthetics profoundly affected the ways in which fashionable Americans viewed

²⁵Jeremy Belknap, Journal of a Tour from Boston to Oneida, June 1796 with Dr. Morse (Cambridge, Massachusetts: John Wilson and Sons, 1882), p. 10.

²⁶Ibid., p. 11.

²⁷Ibid., p. 14.

²⁸See below section II

their physical environment and expressed their vision.²⁹ The Scottish philosophy especially affected those who wrote about and painted the natural wonders of upstate New York. Finally, the combination of Romanticism and Scottish Common Sense Realism in the American environment produced a way of looking at the national experience which is distinctive in several ways from European modes of perception. This needs to be identified and analyzed as an element of nineteenth century sentiment towards the American wilderness.³⁰

II

Intellectual history necessarily involves categorizing and simplifying. The dangers of such an exercise must especially caution those whose business is not merely vague ideas or grand designs of the past, but the past in all of its particularity. James Jackson Jarves neatly expressed the dilemma.

²⁹ See below sections III and IV.

³⁰ It should also be recognized that certain social conditions made the appreciation of the natural landscape, the wilderness, available to the American public. It is not insignificant that improved transportation increased the availability of the natural wonders of the American landscape to those who wished to spend the time and energy to find them. Also, there was a growing class of persons, mostly from the commercial establishment, who had the time and money to travel and experience the American land. Thus, for social and economic reasons, the American public was more able to accept the new ideas which flooded into these colonies around the time of the War of Independence -- the combination of availability and receptivity was fortuitous.

There are grave objections to generalizations. In condensing the mental characteristics of individuals or epochs a degree of misapprehension or injustice can scarcely be avoided. Yet, in looking back over the stream of time, certain lights and shadows are so conspicuous as to give a general tone to the view. Doubtless a nearer sight would disclose the brighter or darker spots, now lost in the distance. It is sufficient, however, for common distinctions to faithfully report ³¹ the view as a whole.

"Romanticism" is one of the "conspicuous" elements which gives a "general tone" to the culture of the early American Republic. A European stream of light shone through the New World prism, and emerged with unique characteristics. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to outline a principal source of that light.³²

Walter Johnson Bates caught the context of British Romanticism in describing it as the "aesthetic and critical reverberations of the tendencies of British empiricism" which "form the groundwork for the somewhat heterogeneous body of assumptions, inclinations, and values [which turned away] in whatever direction, from the classical standard of ideal nature, and from the accompanying conviction that the full exercise of

³¹James Jackson Jarves, The Art-Idea: Sculpture, Painting and Architecture in America (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1866), Third Edition, p. 50.

³²Professor A. O. Lovejoy has pleaded with students of Romanticism to discriminate between various types of European Romanticisms, believing that to lump together all of the various manifestations of this movement, so-called, into one category is to do an injustice to the unique aspects of each manifestation. See A. O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," Publications of the Modern Language Association, Vol. 39, pp. 229-253.

ethical reason may grasp the objective ideal." Bates explains this context. British Romanticism substituted for "classical" premises

the belief that such truths as can be known are to be found primarily in or through the particular, and that this truth is to be realised, appreciated, and declared in art by the response to that particular of some faculty or capacity in man which is imaginative and often emotional rather than 'rational' and which therefore inclines to be somewhat individualistic and subjective in its working. It is for this reason that romanticism branches into so many different directions and that no one specific work of art, no one purpose, mood, interest, or genre, is in any sense completely 33 typical of it.

Hoxie Neale Fairchild identified at least three "directions" -- naturalism, transcendentalism and medievalism -- which have "reverberated" through western thought since 1700 and were "never by any means obliterated" by a "rationalistic and pseudo-classical conception of Nature." These "directions," which Fairchild characterized as a "more primitivistic, Arcadian, sentimental, religious conception of nature, bearing implications of innocence, freedom, spontaneity and the validity of untutored feeling as the guide to truth" and which "from the very beginning of the eighteenth century were related in a vague way to the blessings of rustic life and the beauties of scenery," were "native" to the British mind. On occasion, however,

³³ Walter Johnson Bates, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 94.

they were simply overshadowed by "pseudo-classical" standards of taste and value, standards which had hardly taken definitive form when they began to slough down into the transitional mid-eighteenth century flux from which arose what we call the romantic movement."³⁴

Professor A. O. Lovejoy has admirably performed the complex and confusing task of sorting out various meanings of the terms "nature" and "naturalism" in European thought.³⁵ Central to his analysis is "nature" signifying simply the geographical and biological environment in which we live -- birds, flowers, trees, streams, mountains, scenery in general. Not surprisingly, a key element in the naturalistic "direction" of Romanticism was affection for this physical reality.

It was not always so. In a more horizontal type of intellectual history, a history of the "development of the aesthetics of the infinite," Marjorie Hope Nicolson has traced the image of the mountain in European thought from "Nature's Shames and Ills" and "Warts, Wens, Blisters, Imposthumes" to "temples of Nature built by the Almighty" and "natural cathedrals, or natural altars . . . with their clouds resting on them as the smoke of a continual sacrifice." Although philosophical, theological and geological controversies, particularly about the two most

³⁴Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Romantic Quest (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 108-9.

³⁵Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Nature as Aesthetic Norm," Modern Language Notes XLII (1927), pp. 444-450.

widely read theodicies of the seventeenth century, Milton's Paradise Lost and Thomas Burnet's The Sacred Theory of the Earth, provide an insight into the process of change, these controversies must not obscure the fact that the change in attitude towards the raw and wild physical environment from the end of the medieval period to the beginning of the nineteenth century was radical and abrupt. It was, as Nicolson says, "one of the most profound revolutions in thought that has ever occurred."³⁶ Europeans experienced a fluctuation of thought, a readjustment between what Norbert Wiener calls the scientific (or Manichaeian) view of nature and the romantic (or Augustinian) view of nature.³⁷ Prior to the "Romantic Movement", these two opposing anthropological poles appear to have gone off balance, and the cultural elite, particularly in Britain, tried to make amends. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, North Atlantic culture found itself in the throes of a reaction against the dominant rationalistic bias in which all nature was seen as uncaring and neutral as a measure of all things.

The key element of this abrupt change emerged as the visible, wild universe, untouched and untamed (or only barely so) came to symbolize the fundamental beauty

³⁶ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite (New York: W. and W. Norton Company, Inc., 1963), p. 2. This volume was first published by the Cornell University Press in 1959.

³⁷ Norbert Wiener, The Human Use of Human Beings; Cybernetics and Society (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1954).

and goodness of nature. Curiously, symbols often loom as large as that which they symbolize. The "temples of Nature built by the Almighty," the "natural cathedral or natural altars" assumed what can only be called a religious quality. Evaluating this today as mere sentimentality should not blind us to the observation that this religious quality was nonetheless explicit and real for those who were part of this cultural revolution. The fascination and complexity of this story is attested by the rapidity with which the attitude of abhorrence was suddenly changed to an attitude of reverence for the concrete image and its symbolization.

Affection for the physical world may be called the worldly side of Romanticism. Fairchild also identifies an other-worldly "direction" which he terms "Transcendentalism." The close connection between the experience of mountain scenery and its symbolization cautions us, however, against making too wide a separation between the "this-worldly" and the "other worldly" aspects of Romanticism. Fairchild provides clarification noting that the "transcendental side may be defined as belief in the dominance of the intuitive and spiritual elements of mentality over sense experience."³⁸ Right seeing, seeing through, going beyond the mere sense impression of the eyes became an important goal of the Romantics.

³⁸ Fairchild, op. cit., p. 140.

That the romantic sensibility cannot be boxed into neat little cubes seems obvious. Human beings have a curious capacity for embodying contradictions in their life and work; the Romantics were quite human in this regard. Furthermore, the tension was a source of their creativity. Logical consistency was, for them, the "hobgoblin of little minds." This reinforces the suggestion that these seemingly contradictory elements, a "downward-Looking" or worldly element (naturalism) and an "upward-looking" or other-worldly element (transcendentalism) were "directions" -- tendencies, moods, or attitudes -- rather than philosophical positions.³⁹ This had the net effect of emphasizing differences between individuals, between nationalities and between cultural traditions. German intellectuals, for example, busily resurrected their unique pre-Greco-Roman heritage. In the United States, however, the trend towards cultural differentiation manifested itself not in ethnic distinctions (although these were maintained on a de facto basis through economic mechanisms), but rather in accentuating geographical differentiation. The New England, Middle Atlantic, Southern and Western states, hitherto separated according to broad religious, economic and political categories, were now increasingly distinguished according to differing cultural traditions. Suffice it to note that the Transcendentalists of Concord and the Knickerbocker

³⁹Ibid.

writers and authors of New York City were all Romantics.

Romanticism provided a means not only to help Americans distinguish themselves from each other, but also to distinguish themselves from their Old World background. If one of the philosophical kingpins of the Concord Romantics was the "right of every individual to be different from other human beings, the right -- in fact the duty -- of the individual not to conform," it was also the "right of the nation to be different from other nations, the right -- in fact the duty -- of the nation not to conform."⁴⁰ Romanticism fueled the smoldering fires of resentment at European affronts to the New World, still a cultural colony for many Tories. The attitude held by many Europeans towards the American experiment and the stiff American reaction is best exemplified in the paper war between American and British journalists.⁴¹ Americans found themselves in a defensive position throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, for although the War of Independence signaled the possibility of a political and economic

⁴⁰ George Boas (editor), Romanticism in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 192.

⁴¹ The American Quarterly Review of Philadelphia and the North American Review of Boston were particularly important vehicles of American self-defense. The Edinburgh Review served as their British counterpart. See further Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years: 1690-1940 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), pp. 207ff.

break from the mother country, cultural dependence remained strong.

Yet the thrust towards finding cultural rootedness and national identity proved to be a strong weapon for those Americans who wished to emphasize a unique New World inheritance in the natural world. Just as the Teutons looked to their eastern origins as the source of their separateness from Greco-Roman civilization, Americans looked to their virginal past embodied in magnificent forests and rivers, and untouched land which stretched the imagination. Europe could not boast of that. When waterfalls, wild scenery and untamed land became aesthetically valuable commodities, Americans quickly moved to corner the market on "natural wonders." If nothing else was salable from the American experience, the virgin forests of the New World were close to priceless on the cultural exchange.⁴²

⁴²Unspoiled nature in this period seems to have meant primeval landscape, but not magnificent animals or primitive man. It is perhaps just speculation, but clearly the fear of wild animals remained strong in American life so long as a frontier was threatened by what was considered the danger of wild beasts to women, children and domestic animals (though not necessarily in that order). Americans have always preferred to see wild animals behind the bars of a cage where they can be taunted without fear of injury. For a good discussion of the image of the primitive man ("noble savage") in early American thought, see Roy Harvey Pearce, Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967). Other studies of the image of the American Indian are in process -- in fact, interest in this aspect of American Indian studies has exploded lately. The best book to come out in this area within the past few years is Richard VanDerBeets (editor), Held Captive by the Indians: Selected Narratives, 1642-1836 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1973). The introductory essay in this

Not only were the majestic giants of the American wilderness praised as unique to these shores. We had human monuments as well -- soldiers who died for their country and its freedom. They did not represent the cultural riches of a splendid and memorable past, nor were they terribly ancient, but they did represent a cry for freedom and justice in the eyes of those who shaped this nation. Although the physical monuments in their memory were simple in design, in their acts, they left a legacy of freedom from tyranny and oppression, a legacy more important than all their physical memorials or all the objets d'art of Europe. Whether or not the visible monuments of European culture outshone those of the American War of Independence in terms of beauty and skill of execution was of secondary importance to the feeling that Americans had much more to memorialize than Europe's withered images of a tyrannical past.

The United States, struggling for a national identity over against those from whom they had liberated themselves, embraced Romanticism, for the classical Greco-Roman tradition and ideals could not be satisfactory in an America with no humanistic tradition (except as handed down thru centuries of intermediate cultures) and only

book is brilliant. While the white image of the animate inhabitants of the wilderness, homo sapiens and otherwise, is important and fascinating, it is peripheral to the focus of this study.

vaguely and recently propounded ideals. "Romanticism as a philosophy was much more useful to this country than the more traditional classicism."⁴³ Americans were searching for an organized sentiment which would give credence to their need to display their differences from those whom they had just rejected as politically inferior. Americans needed to establish themselves as culturally equal. This need was justified and encouraged by the Romantic mood.

Another dimension of Romanticism significantly penetrated the life of Americans. Eleanor P. Spencer persuasively suggests that a search for greatness, transcending both time and place, was very much a part of the romantic's goal.⁴⁴ While there are important differences between Neo-classic and Romantic art, her uneasiness with traditional distinctions results in a search for a more inclusive definition of Romanticism. She concludes that "the whole generation of the 1830's and 1840's seems to have longed desperately to be great. The self conscious expression of this is the very fabric of Romanticism."⁴⁵

This characteristic may be considered a perspective on the thrust towards individual and cultural non-conformism. Spencer recognizes that the desire to be

⁴³Boas, op. cit., p. xi. Boas uses the term "philosophy" loosely. Perhaps "attitude" would be a more appropriate term.

⁴⁴Eleanor P. Spencer, "New Patterns of Greatness," in Boas, Ibid., pp. 12-23.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 12.

great "is linked with the wholehearted recognition of the individual, including oneself."⁴⁶ But in emphasizing that greatness (not fame) meant the strong conviction of inner achievement rather than the applause of the world, I believe that she has emphasized the individual threads of this "fabric" at the expense of its texture. Romanticism affected individual Americans and the national mood. Yet certainly the desire to be great was an important element in America's absorption of European Romanticism. For the individual Romantic, there was no place for mediocrity; for the new American nation there were only high ideals, vast vistas, huge waterfalls, enormous land purchases and tremendous canal projects. Greatness meant work -- long hours at the easel or with the pen. For the new nation the thrust to be great meant overtime, physical hardship and personal sacrifice.

If greatness did not mean world acclaim, but rather the strong conviction of inner achievement, it is hardly surprising that people sought to ease their nagging fears of insignificance by visiting, regardless of the transportation difficulties, the great "natural wonders" of the New World. Few Americans had the prowess of the Concord folk, who, with the exception of Henry Thoreau, claimed to have penetrated the wonders of the natural world in their minds. For most, seeing was believing and

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

therefore the trek to the wonders of upstate New York became an important part of being an American. Calculated to assure feelings of greatness, it could mitigate New World anxieties as well as the drudgery of daily living. What they saw in the Falls of Trenton and Niagara, from the heights of the Catskills and in the majesty of the flowing Hudson was the "infinity of God." It satisfied their "passion for the sublime" and kindled their "wonder at the supernatural. The infinite powers of God seemed a little nearer in the presence of the great mountains, vast panoramas, immense rivers and ancient oaks."⁴⁷ The sublimity and beauty of these proved that America was a great nation and its people a great people.

These wonders made an indelible impression on individual tourists and on the mood of the nation. The Thames and the Rhine, despite the lore which oozed from their shores, were streams compared to the great expanse of the Hudson River. The monarch of American wonders, Niagara Falls, "was at once supernatural and sublime and real, a divine sigh upon the earth visible to every eye."⁴⁸ That was something that no European waterfalls could claim. And the Catskills, forested with virgin trees and from which one had a five-state view, were far superior to the treeless hills of Scotland and northern England.

Such ecstasy over New York's "natural wonders"

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 14-15.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 15.

should not lead one to the conclusion that these visitors were all pantheists. They maintained the distinction between God and Nature. However, as Fairchild observed,

the general effect of romantic naturalism was to inculcate a vaguely religious attitude in which 'Nature' and 'God' were more or less interchangeable terms. 49

The descendental and transcendental elements of Romanticism often became fused so that a separation was impossible. The wonderful was real; the real was wonderful. And so, in the minds of many,

nature. . . while it retained its old claims to be a universal system [classicism], slowly became less like a watch and [more] like a tree. It thrust its roots into the soil, but lifted its head into the skies. It was at once vast and intimate. It had room for love, beauty, and religion, for all the warm stirrings of emotion. It was free, plastic, and expensive, rather than final, determined and restrictive. 50

III

Much nineteenth century American cultural historiography was built on the common, yet facile interpretation of pre-Civil War white American culture as a faint second-rate copy of European culture. Frederick Jackson Turner challenged this thesis in his famous essay The Significance of the Frontier in American History (1893), swinging the historiographical pendulum away from the earlier model. Turner, with a curious echo of Crèvecoeur,

⁴⁹ Fairchild, op. cit., p. 188.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

declared in his now familiar cadences that

The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of dress and thought. . . . Little by little, he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs. . . . The fact is that here ⁵¹ is a new product that is American.

For a time, the "frontier thesis" was de rigueur among historians of Turner's generation. Meanwhile, some historians who Turner criticized modestly revised their thesis by sacrificing generality to what they mistakenly understood as a challenge for interpretive clarity. Predictably, they isolated Britain as the primary source of American culture on the dubious assumption that Britain's geographical detachment from continental Europe indicated cultural detachment as well.

As Turner observed, the inadequacies of the model he inherited stem from its failure to account for such factors as the different physical environments in which new Americans found themselves. Fortified with memories of a mistaken nineteenth century criticism, and often combined with an apologetic for the superiority of European culture, those who interpreted American culture as a poor copy of European (and particularly British) culture

⁵¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921), pp. 3-4. See also Ray Allen Billington, Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) for a marvelous interpretation of Turner and the development of his "frontier thesis."

failed to understand the genius of Europe and the genius of America. Pre-Turnerian historiography failed to consider the possibility that a derivative culture may exhibit peculiarities not explained by an analysis of the original.

The study of American literature is a case in point. New Yorkers such as William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving have only recently been studied and recognized on their own merits. For so long, they were considered merely as American versions of William Wordsworth, Sir Walter Scott and Oliver Goldsmith, respectively. But the pendulum swings, and in the name of redressing the balance, some historians have succumbed to the temptation of exaggerating the American peculiarities of these and other Americans. At the very least, and particularly in the study of cultural phenomena, we must distinguish between the uncritical embodiment of British models by some unhappy Tories and the more significant transformation of European models by other Americans intoxicated by the spirit of a "strange new world." Despite fascinating peculiarities, it is impossible to ignore Europe in any discussion of culture in the early Republic.

Howard Mumford Jones seems to have found a middle ground. He has written eloquently about the particular elements in American life which distinguish America from Europe, while warning against the desire to (a) call

America "wholly unique" and (b) say that we are simply a monotonous copy of European civilization, and a bad copy at that. Jones interprets American civilization as the

interplay of two great sets of forces -- the Old World and the New. . . .The Old World projected onto the New a rich and complex and contradictory set of habits, forces, practices, values, and presuppositions; and the New World accepted, modified, or rejected these or fused them with inventions of their own. . . .America has been neither discovery nor creation, but something of both. We are neither as unique as the siege psychology of the radical right asseverates nor as featureless as the denouncers of American monotony and propagandists for the wave of the future say we are. We are still Europe at one remove or two, but we are part of Europe still. 52

"The New World could not invent a new language, a new system of laws, new educational institutions, a new philosophy, and new forms of literature and the arts"⁵³ that was not tainted with the Old World politics which they rejected. Despite brave pronouncements to the contrary, America could not escape history. Neither could they escape their environment. As Jones says, "Men are never wholly products of their environment, but they must forever reckon with it."⁵⁴

I have identified Romanticism as a key European

⁵² Howard Mumford Jones, O Strange New World, American Culture: The Formative Years (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), p. x.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 328.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 392.

influence in early nineteenth century American culture. Related and often overlapping was a more specific and identifiable "school" of thought, Scottish Common Sense Realism.⁵⁵ Its influence on American life and culture was profound and direct, especially on the religious and aesthetic sensibilities of the early Republic. James McCosh, a transplanted clergyman who presided over Princeton University from 1868 to 1888, hinted at the importance of the Scottish school.

America has arrived at a stage at which there is a body of men and women who have leisure and taste to cultivate the liberal arts and advance the higher forms of civilization. . . .the thinking people have not formed a separate school, as the French, the English, the Scotch and the Germans have. In the last century and the earlier part of this, they followed Locke or Reid, one or both, always making an independent use of what they adopted -- as a rule they took from Locke only what was good. . . .If a genuine American philosophy arises, it must reflect the genius of the people. Now, Yankees are distinguished from most others by their

⁵⁵ Scottish Common Sense Realism has been variously referred to as "The Scottish Philosophy" (Ahlstrom), "Common Sense Realism" (Schneider), "Common Sense Thought" and "The Scottish Enlightenment" (Sloan). All refer in broad outline to a trend of thought which reacted against the skepticism of Hume and the idealism of Berkeley and was centered in the Scottish Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. I shall employ the terms "Scottish," "Common Sense," "Thought," and "Aesthetics" in various combinations in this study. For my purposes, these combinations are interchangeable with one exception. The bulk of the printed output of these philosophers was in the arena of political, social and economic thought. Since my concern is more aesthetic than sociopolitical, I use the terms "Common Sense Aesthetic" and "Scottish Aesthetic" without institutional implications.

practical observation and invention. They have a pretty clear notion of what a thing is, and, if it is of value, they take steps to secure it. . . .It follows that if there is to be an American philosophy, it must be realistic. 56

Herbert Schneider dismisses McCosh's attempt to explain what American philosophy "must be" as "ridiculous." But precisely because Scottish Common Sense was a sort of eclectic realism it became "probably the most potent single tradition in the American Enlightenment," arousing men "from their dogmatic slumbers on both sides of the Atlantic."⁵⁷ Schneider focussed on the influence of Common Sense Realism on American philosophy. Others have testified to the significance of Scottish thought on other aspects of American life and culture.⁵⁸ Sydney Ahlstrom has observed that in theological America, Scottish came to be the "handmaiden of both Unitarianism and Orthodoxy,"

free enough from subtlety to be communicable in sermons and tracts. . . .existing therefore, as a vast subterranean influence, a sort of water-table nourishing dogmatics in an age of increasing doubt. 59

⁵⁶James McCosh, Realistic Philosophy Defended in a Philosophic Series (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1890), vol. I, pp. 1-4.

⁵⁷Herbert W. Schneider, A History of American Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946).

⁵⁸Despite the numerous references to the importance of Scottish thought on American culture, there seems to be a distinct lack of studies on the specific thought structures of the philosophy as expounded by the leading Scottish University philosophers.

⁵⁹Sydney Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," Church History XXIV, no. 3 (1955), pp. 257-8.

Terence Martin, writing on the relationship of Scottish thought to American literature, concludes that Common Sense Thought had attained an "unofficial status of orthodoxy in the first half of the nineteenth century."⁶⁰

Merle Curti casts his net a bit wider. "No group of writers using the English language was more esteemed in cultivated circles than the Scottish Common Sense school of philosophers."⁶¹ Pointing to the influence on college curricula, especially in shaping the "oratorical and literary tastes of the rising generation,"⁶² and its general dissemination among the "mansion people" and the "well read," Curti explains that it was

⁶⁰Terence Martin, The Instructed Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961), p. 53.

⁶¹Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 228.

⁶²Some excellent scholarship has recently been done on this point. See especially Douglas Sloan, The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal (New York: Teachers College Press of Columbia University, 1971) for a general discussion of the Scottish influence on college curricula, particularly at Princeton. Also Daniel Walker Howe, The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy 1800-1860 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970) for its influence at Harvard University. Also significant: Leon Howard, The Connecticut Wits (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1943) for a discussion of the Kamesian influence at Yale and Frederick W. Seward's autobiographical Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman and Diplomat (New York: 1916) which reports on a widely respected course on Kames offered by President Eliphalet Nott at Union College.

admirably suited to the needs of conservative minded intellectuals. . . .concerned in their everyday life with the hardheaded tasks of consolidating the existing order and promoting commercial and industrial enterprises. 63

Roy Harvey Pearce, whose study of white attitudes towards the native American sets a standard of excellence in American cultural history, makes a similar point about the Scottish. While emphasizing the complexity of the historiographical problems in any detailed history of the Scottish influence on America, he boldly states,

Eighteenth and nineteenth century Americans, trying to establish a prosperous new society out of a revolution, generally found the Scottish Common Sense empiricism and intuitionism. . . .and the Scottish idea of progress fitted into their own newfound need for order and stability and growth. In a word, as Americans read them, the Scots made rationalism, freedom, and individualism safe, even conservative. They made possible the interpretation of a revolution as a phase of social evolution. They assured progress and gave it a rationale. And so their thinking became American thinking. . . .They succeeded in making common sense out of Locke, revolution, Christianity and progress. 64

In his characteristically expansive fashion, Perry Miller concluded that "through almost all these regions [technology, agriculture, chemistry, geology] 'Common Sense' metaphysics prevail, and epistemological 'realism' is enthroned."65

⁶³Curti, op. cit., p. 228.

⁶⁴Pearce, op. cit., p. 318.

⁶⁵Perry Miller, The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p. 318.

The struggle of two leading American intellectuals, James Marsh (1794-1842) and Thomas Cooper (1759-1839) testifies to the geographical spread of Scottish Common Sense Thought from Vermont to South Carolina. Marsh, who introduced Coleridge to the New World, reported in his introduction to the first American edition of Aids to Reflection in 1829 that the Scottish influence was the greatest obstacle to the acceptance of Coleridge in the United States. Marsh's vociferous attacks on two fronts testifies to the strength of the enemy. To those who politely denied any metaphysical bias, relying rather on "common sense" and "popular opinion," Marsh countered,

I know it is customary to disclaim the influence of philosophy in the business of interpretation, and every writer now-a-days on such subjects will assure us, that he has nothing to do with metaphysics, but is guided only by common sense and the laws of interpretation. But I would like to know how a man comes by any common sense in relation to the movements and laws of his intellectual and moral being without metaphysics. 66

To those who recognized their metaphysical bias, he stated his feelings somewhat differently.

I do not hesitate to express my conviction, that the natural tendency of some of the leading principles of our prevailing system of metaphysics and those which must unavoidably have more or less influence on our theoretical views of religion, are an impious and dangerous tendency. . . .by the prevailing

⁶⁶ James Marsh (editor), Aids to Reflection by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Burlington, Vermont: Chauncey Goodrich, 1829), p. xxii. First American Edition from the First London Edition with a preliminary essay and additional notes by James Marsh.

system of metaphysics, I mean the system, of which in modern times Locke is the reputed author, and the leading principles of which, with various modifications, more or less important, but not altering its essential character, have been almost universally received in this country. 67

But even more important, Marsh paints a vivid picture of the overwhelming burden such anti-intellectualism puts on the spiritual maturity of America.

It is our peculiar misfortune in this country, that while the philosophy of Locke and the Scottish writers has been received in full faith, as the only rational system, and its leading principles especially passed off as unquestionable, the strong attachment to religion and the fondness for speculation, by both of which we are strongly characterized, have led us to combine and associate these principles, such as they are, with our religious interests and opinions, so variously and so intimately, that by most persons they are considered as necessary parts of the same system; and from being so contemplated together, the rejection of one seems impossible without doing violence to the other. . . .so long as we hold the doctrines of Locke and the Scotch metaphysicians respecting power, cause and effect, motives and freedom of the will, we [can] make and defend no essential distinction between that which is natural and that which is spiritual. 68

As long as the "natural" and "spiritual" were not distinguished in people's minds, the early nineteenth century image of the American wilderness could assume a spiritual dimension.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. xxviii-xxix.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. xlv-xlv.

Thomas Cooper, whose extraordinarily prolific and versatile pen earned him the dubious distinction of "agitator," was somewhat less polite. Accusing the Scottish philosophers and their American fellow-travellers of literary obfuscation, intellectual poppy-cock and poetic flights of fancy, he unwittingly pointed to (1) the Americanization of Scottish thought and (2) one characteristic of Scottish thought which appealed to American sensibilities.

First, what was received in America was not a coherent body of thought, except as developed by a few intellectuals, but concepts often separated from their philosophical context. McCosh admits as much in observing that Americans took "what was good." What was available to those Americans not closely tied to the intellectual currents of Europe was a filtered version of Scottish thought which, transformed in the transfer from Scotland to North America and forced into contexts different from those of the Scottish university, became a pale version of the mother philosophy. I do not mean to imply that the Scots all held the same philosophical position. They were eminently capable of disagreeing among themselves. But the disagreements were intramural, and in the American context, it is not inaccurate to speak of a "school." For Americans, simply labeling the source of their aesthetics as Scottish was a sign of considerable education. Americans adopted not a philosophical system but concepts

which served as a base from which to grow and expand according to the peculiarities of the American environment.

Second, and despite the process of Americanization, the cumulative effect of familiar words such as "beautiful," picturesque" and "sublime" was to provide a confusing, though significant context for discourse.⁶⁹ Precisely the imprecision and malleableness of the Scottish vocabulary appealed to the American cultural elite, for like clay it could be sculpted to suit a variety of New World temperaments and experiences.⁷⁰ To the innocent "American Adam," unfamiliar with the intricate European aesthetic debate, these words were neither so overloaded with intellectual nuances as to make them nonfunctional, nor were they so removed from the New

⁶⁹ On this issue, see Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1959). Also Christopher Hussey, The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: Cass, 1967); Samuel H. Monk, The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1960); Myra Reynolds, The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry Between Pope and Wordsworth (New York: Gordian Press, 1966), originally published by the University of Chicago Press in 1896; Elizabeth Manwarling, Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England; A Study Chiefly of the Influence of Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa on English Taste 1700-1800 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925). Each of these volumes has suggestive bibliographies on this complex and fascinating subject.

⁷⁰ Sydney Ahlstrom suggests this with respect to sermonizing. See footnote 59.

World experiences as to make them meaningless and irrelevant. Crèvecoeur's "new man" used such concepts to identify what was unique in the New World.⁷¹

Although the ambiguity of eighteenth century Scottish thought was initially attractive, as Scottish thought became institutionalized, imprecision gave way to precision. In this adjustment, Americans naturally substituted descriptive detail for historical intricacy. Romanticism encouraged this quest by focusing concern on the immediate sensation in all its richness. Typically, Americans who used the language of Scottish aesthetics were more concerned with the present and with the future than with its history and development. The true meaning of the "sublime" was to be understood by viewing Niagara Falls, not by studying the controversies that swirled around Edmund Burke's Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757). Similarly, the "picturesque" and the "beautiful" could be adequately experienced in the Hudson River Valley without the benefit of Uvedale Price's Essay on the

⁷¹Perry Miller suggested a far broader use of the word "sublime" than is my concern, using it as the organizing sentimentality for much of nineteenth century American culture. In discussing the missionary zeal of the first half of the nineteenth century, Miller observes that though "the 'sublime' was a sanction not lightly invoked, . . . it was becoming the banner of native genius in the arts and sciences. . . and was offered as the true signification of the massive [missionary] exertion. By the 1840's, it had become the standardized, yet compulsive image." Miller, Life of the Mind, op. cit., p. 57.

Picturesque, as Compared to the Sublime and the Beautiful (1796) or other volumes of eighteenth century English criticism.⁷²

Clearly, Scottish thought served a critical function in establishing the "American mind," to use Perry Miller's term. Most educated persons of the early Republic clearly thought that the Scots had a monopoly on aesthetic truth. Certainly they wrote and acted as if they did. Sentimental romantics and weary travellers, nature lovers and scientific oracles -- all used the Scottish language as if it had a distinct meaning. They felt that they were communicating with considerable precision. It remains to indicate more precisely the Scottish concepts that played such an important role in the development of American religious and aesthetic thought and the reasons for the Scottish influence.

IV

Despite the institutional bias,⁷³ Scottish thought

⁷³It is important to note that Scottish Common Sense is usually analyzed in institutional terms. However, Gladys Bryson in her book Man and Society: The Scottish Inquiry of the Eighteenth Century (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Reprints of Economic Classics, 1968) concludes, "If this chapter were not devoted to some rehearsal of the efforts to deal with institutions, it would be interesting to go into some account of the renewed interest in aesthetics and the passion for elegance exemplified in this group of authors. We have noted elsewhere a few evidences of this phase of the Enlightenment. They all wrote on standards of taste, several of them were involved in the Ossian controversy, and even the sedate Adam Smith devoted some essays to the imitative arts, to music and to dancing.

had a strain of well-developed aesthetic theory which turned primarily around the definition of key terminology in the British tradition of Burke and his colleagues. Controversy raged over words at the center of Anglo-American rhetoric -- beauty, sublime and picturesque. Concern for this rhetoric held various strains of Scottish aesthetic thought together, and even more important, brought it into relationship with the similar concerns of Romanticism. While there are distinctions to be made between the Scottish aesthetic and Romanticism, focusing on their differences should not blind us to their common concern for a proper appreciation of the natural world.

The philosophical debate between Scottish Common Sense aesthetics and English Romanticism was significant in British life and culture, but its details were irrelevant to all but the most highly educated Americans who in a highly pragmatic fashion took "what was good" or convenient and worried little about a philosophical system. The aesthetic debate conducted in Britain had no equal in American intellectual life. The new nation had other more pressing concerns.

In each case, the aim was to 'discover the springs of our mental pleasures,' to use Montesquieu's expression, and to find, by examination of man's mental equipment, what principles or criteria of appreciation he had by nature. It was, in Kames' words, 'an examination of the sensitive branch of human nature,' and by most authors the study was held to be a great support to ethics and morality."

Briefly then, as I have done for the Romantic background, I shall outline the Scottish background relevant to its American adaptation. The Scottish were fearful of economic, social and aesthetic distortion. In an era of rapid and seemingly uncontrolled change, they dealt with their conscious fears by defining the actual, concrete world of perception as the arena of truth, beauty and happiness. The world of possibility was not only secondary, but false. Actual people, actual events, actual scenery, actual natural wonders, actual wilderness -- these constituted reality. The detached imagination warped one's vision of reality, misled the affections and blinded the understanding.

Scottish realism gave a position of superiority to the world as perceived and known by the senses on the assumption that the real is limited to this world and its objects. Yet the continuing problem remained of trying to separate the real from the imaginary. To this end, Scottish common sense philosophers developed an elaborate theory of perception. They moved to establish the reality of human perception in terms of the primary and unimpeachable testimony of human consciousness. What persons experienced through their five senses was real. Reality was concrete and external. Taste, touch and smell yielded a bit more, but it was through the sense of sight that those concerned with external reality learned most about their physical environment. Since there could be nothing

in the mind that was not first in the senses, the "pictorial mode," as Donald Ringe correctly observes, became the principal vehicle for knowledge.⁷⁴

Paralleling the Scots, Americans also gave greater status to the faculties of perception. As Ahlstrom put it, "Self-consciousness became the oracle of religious truth."⁷⁵ Americans became more self-confident of their powers and abilities, in distinct contrast to the presupposition of human limitation at the root of traditional Calvinist teachings of divine dependence. Although the realm of possibility was still subject to human limitation, people were increasingly sure that in observing the actual, they were witnessing the real. There could be no doubt about the value of the present -- the past was not vitally needed for an understanding of the present and there was no reason to assume that the future would be significantly different from the present. In this sense it was a conservative philosophy, for the order of possibility was subordinate, dependent, and incomplete in itself. Existing reality gained a measure of socio-economic and aesthetic authority.

Such a self-understanding was ideally suited for a new nation struggling to find its own identity. The

⁷⁴Donald A. Ringe, The Pictorial Mode: Space and Time in the Art of Bryant, Irving and Cooper (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1971).

⁷⁵Ahlstrom, op. cit., p. 269.

Scottish philosophy encouraged Americans to trust their perceptions, to consider their sensate faculties as a window on the real, and to investigate their actual physical environment. Were the stories of America's "natural wonders" imaginary or real? Go and see! Americans wanted to discover for themselves whether the glowing reports they had read and heard were real or whether they were merely fragments of someone's uncontrolled imagination.

The Scottish did not reject the imaginative experience altogether. Rather, the imagination was to be cultivated under the wholesome discipline of rules, reason and good sense. Steadily controlled, the intellect would guide the appreciative faculty. For example, the history and description of a waterfall was thought to increase measurably its appreciation by adventurous visitors. Not only would a person have information as to its physical characteristics and situation, but also its association with memorable military and political events as well as other persons' ideas of its value and meaning. Many guidebooks were written on the innocent assumption that knowledge not only provided logistical information but increased the pleasure of travellers. They also served as a form of aesthetic control. Tourists knew how they were expected to react at a given "natural wonder." Rarely did they publicly differ from that expectation lest they reveal their uncultured and incorrect taste.

A commitment to reason precluded the undisciplined imagination. Joy and ecstasy were frowned upon, for they were uncontrollable. Reason could alternately draw on a world of its own making and dismiss it at the proper moment to return to affairs deemed more important. The cultured imagination, if I may call it that, so very reasonable and commonsensical, was plastic to the extent that it offered a standard of mediocrity to everyone, denying the creative outlet only to those who saw through the limitations of the Scottish aesthetic. For understandable reasons, the aesthetics of actuality as a metaphysics of assurance calmed a cultured elite tired of imaginative excess.

The New World's limited response to Scottish Realism (and Romanticism) tended to focus on two issues.

(1) The "law of association." One of the philosophical pillars of British aesthetics, associationalism, was an important element in Scottish and Romantic thought, this being, parenthetically, one reason why the separation between the two was less than obvious to those Americans who were only aware indirectly, if at all, of the two "movements."

The rapidity with which associationalism influenced aesthetics may not only be attributed to a general state of mind which welcomed a satisfying empirical explanation for aesthetics; it was partly owing to the traditional literary character of British philosophy in general, especially in the later half of the eighteenth century. Few philosophers of the

period, when they sought to illustrate mental processes, failed to discuss the arts; and the relationship between critics and philosophers -- especially from Scotland, from which the bulk of contemporary criticism emanated -- was very close.⁷⁶

Bates isolates two different varieties of British associationalism at the close of the eighteenth century.⁷⁷ The extreme tendency was to define the mind (knowledge) as being totally derived from association; a strictly mechanistic theory which stated that man step by step seeks such goals as pleasure, wealth, happiness, and survival solely in terms of previous associated experiences. John Gay (1685-1732), David Hartley the younger (1732-1813), Joseph Priestly (1733-1804) and Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) used this theory for their own particular purposes, the latter two having a place in the development of natural history and the beginnings of science in the United States.⁷⁸

A less extreme associationalist theory emerged from the Scottish Universities in an attempt to ward off

⁷⁶Bates, op. cit., p. 97.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 100.

⁷⁸Joseph Priestly was a prominent figure in America during the last ten years of his life. He left England in 1794 to seek political and religious freedom. Samuel L. Mitchill (see chapter 2, section 3) briefly flirted with Erasmus Darwin in translating from Latin Darwin's curious volume Zoomania: The Laws of Organic Life (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1796). Translated with a preface to the American Edition by Samuel Latham Mitchill.

both the materialistic bias of their scientifically-minded English colleagues and the skepticism which Hume had shown to be the logical end of empiricism. Typically, the Scottish did not indulge in academic arguments to the same extent as their philosophical colleagues south of the border. Rather, they "regarded the existence of both matter and the soul as beyond quibble and as intuitively self-evident." For them, the repetition of experience by association, though necessary, did not exclusively form the mind, for it was "innately endowed with a vivid capacity to receive, employ and guide what experience brings."⁷⁹

The mechanistic Scottish theory of the imagination was dependent upon associated experiences. The Scots were developing a theory suggested earlier by Hobbes, who regarded the association of ideas as a natural phenomenon of the mind as well as the best explanation of structural coherence in our expression and thought. Employing neo-classic standards of taste and association psychology to illuminate the workings of the mind, the Scottish university philosophers came up with an imagination which was orderly, predictable, reliable, boring and mundane. At least the Romantics thought so, for they rebelled against what they felt was a pedantic and restrictive use of the law of association in the University philosophy of the

⁷⁹Bates, op. cit., p. 102.

day. In summarizing the Scottish use of associationalism, Bates concludes that the

Scottish school. . . .extended the reach and scope of direct intuition to a common sense acceptance of matter-of-fact. In its combination of an intuitionism, which includes both sentiment and common sense, with a conservative use of empirical associationalism, the Scottish philosophy represents a distinctive compromise and fusion of almost all of whatever eighteenth century British tendencies of thought cannot be described as humanist or classical -- although, in very British fashion, it also occasionally reflects values and attitudes which are very far from unclassical. 80

How then did Romantics and Scots differ in their use of associationalism? While both used association psychology to explain all (the Scots) or part (the Romantics) of the imaginative experience, they proceeded on different assumptions. English Romantic criticism, in addition to finding objectively detached and separate meanings for the occasions perceived by the senses, went a step further and found that a subjectively valid totality was rendered by the process. While the Scottish logic resulted in a piecemeal vision of the real, except for an artificial order imposed by the mind's own subjectivity, the romantic use of associationalism tended to be synthetic in its conception. Bates again observed,

however numerous the component parts of which it takes cognizance, [the romantic imagination] grasps its object as the simple, unified particular that it is, and presents it with a similar amalgamated totality. 81

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 118

For the romantic, the law of association was used to bring diffuse experience together into a unity; for the Scottish, the law of association left a trail of distinctions and differentiation. Little attempt was made to clean up and organize the associational refuse, for that attempt, according to the Scottish, would arrogate a certain creativity to human beings which was beyond their human function and abilities. Whereas the romantic imagination tended to focus on an ideal of unification and integration, the Scottish imagination was satisfied to spend time examining the parts. In the United States, both tendencies operated side by side.

(2) The contrast between unifying and dissecting tendencies raises an important theological problem on which Scottish Realists and Romantics were in major disagreement. The Romantics tended to minimize the traditional opposition between God as creator and man as creator, for ultimately there was only one act of creation and man, to his glory, could share in it. Few reached such heights, but it was theoretically possible. But for the Scottish, the imagination dissolves and dissipates in order to associate, struggling to recreate a unified whole, even though this process may be rendered impossible for human beings. The romantic ideal was dynamic and future-oriented. But the Scottish found the struggle to recreate beyond its aesthetic purview, leaving the dissolution in all its marvelous variety for human consumption. Its ideal was a detailed understanding of the static present.

The criticism of Romanticism by the conservative Scottish professors and their educated American fellow-travellers was that man arrogated to himself a divine function in assuming a mode of creativity beyond the simple task of association. Playing at God was a direct threat to conventional Calvinist theology and the established order of society. It was blasphemous to consider the artist as a creator. Man invents by putting together associated experiences and perceptions according to certain principles of reason and appropriateness.

For the Scots, God was the only true creator. His works were the result of unique creative powers which could not in any way be reproduced through the process of association. Man's creative efforts could never be God-like because human resources are limited. The Scottish conception left no room for the possibility of private or mystical understandings. Likewise for the romantic, man's inability to explain the unfathomableness of Niagara Falls resulted from his human limitations. Yet the goal remained, and this is the crucial difference. To describe the indescribable, a theoretically possible task rarely, if ever, accomplished, was a beckoning light for the romantics. For the Scot, the human limitations would always remain. To think, hope or act as if the indescribable might be revealed through human effort was blasphemous and to dream of the impossible was useless. God's creation would always remain beyond human comprehension.

The anomaly of the situation is clear. Man can know God's reality only partially and imperfectly, whereas he can know the incomplete realities conceived by the mind fully and perfectly. The theoretical impossibility of fully knowing God's worldly creation led some critics to consider ideas as the proper objects of thought. Increasingly, reality became located within the mind, a situation which culminated in another variety of idealism, just the philosophical position the principal Scottish philosophers had attempted to refute.⁸²

The burden of Scottish thought was to establish the reality of God's creation independent of the human mind while knowing it only imperfectly. The natural world was attractive for it provided the principal evidence of God's creative powers -- it was evidence of divine beneficence. Furthermore, since (1) the study of God's creation was superior to the study of mental processes and (2) it was undoubtedly God's intention that the objects of perception should produce much stronger impressions on the mind than its own operations, must not persons therefore look to a direct experience of nature for truth? Yes, said the Scottish, and their philosophy encouraged the fashionable urge to travel and behold "nature's wonders" in Europe and America. But the conflict remained.

⁸²See Archibald Alison, Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste (Edinburgh, 1790) for an example of the tendencies in this direction.

Tourists got caught up in their mental processes while beholding God's "natural wonders." Long habits of solitude and meditation (although induced by the marvel of an external object of nature) could (and did) cause tourists to lose touch with the sensible world and their behavior came almost wholly under the influence of the "primary imagination." For the Scottish, this was dangerous and false. While viewing "natural wonders," it was important not to indulge in flights of imagination. Yet apart from society, withdrawn from the normal domestic pursuits of life, deep in revery and contemplation, tourists tended to lose contact with the actual physical reality to which they were initially drawn.

And so, Scottish thought proved ultimately to be a temporary measure, something Americans lived through, for it anticipated the transcendentalist and intuitionist ideas which it had done its best to avoid. Woodbridge Riley observed that it allowed Americans to "mark time"⁸³ but also that individuals not content to "mark time" indefinitely began to break away, striving for a freer, less canonical approach to truth and reality. James Marsh (for whom the Scottish theory was a block to his own growth), Ralph Waldo Emerson (for whom it was a stepping stone for his own growth) and Henry David Thoreau (for whom no classification is satisfactory), American

⁸³Woodbridge Riley, American Thought from Puritanism to Pragmatism (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915).

Transcendentalists all, are perhaps the most famous of those who broke away from the Scottish mode of viewing and classifying reality.

To conclude this introduction, let us look briefly at the reasons for the influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism on American culture. They follow from three observations. After the political, economic and social upheavals of the late eighteenth century, many Americans (1) longed for the alleged security of a bygone era and (2) feared the possible excesses of a political liberty gone to seed. Feeling the need for some measure of collective stability, they were therefore receptive to philosophical conservatism. (3) In the nineteenth century, Scottish thought was a conservative, traditional mode of thinking raised to the status of a philosophy.

In expressing relief for what they were not, the rhetoric of Margaret Fuller, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne (and later in the century Henry James) exemplified a characteristic distaste for the decadence of Europe's ancient ways. Yet the severity of North America's cultural vacuum was combined with an ambiguous nostalgia for Europe's glorious treasures, a combination which proved fertile for the growth of Scottish Common Sense Thought in the United States. James Jackson Jarves, a leading mid-century art critic, eloquently itemized the new nation's aesthetic deficiencies with this curious combination of distaste and nostalgia.

[The United States] has no antecedent art, no abbeys in picturesque ruins; no stately cathedrals, the legacies of another faith and generation; no medieval architecture, rich in crimson and gold, eloquent with sculpture and color, and venerable with age; no aristocratic mansions, in which art enshrines itself in a selfish and unappreciating era, to come forth to the people in more auspicious times; no state collections to guide a growing taste, no caste of persons of whom fashion demands encouragement to art-growth; no ancestral homes replete with storied portraiture of the past; no legendary lore more dignified than forest or savage life; no history more poetical or fabulous than the deeds of men almost of our own generation, too like ourselves in virtues and vices to seem heroic, -- men noble, good, and wise, but not yet arrived to be gods; and the greatest loss of all, no lofty and sublime poetry. 84

Americans knew that they were no longer merely European, for both the New World's expansive environment and its short history were immeasurably different from Europe's. While the invigorating freedom inspired many, longing infected their response to the New World.

McCosh's "thinking people" also knew what they feared. Events in France scared many of them away from the revolutionary rhetoric of a nation being born although for some these same events only demonstrated the folly of trying to start anew in an Old World. The fears were not that the New World would grow in fresh and exciting ways, but rather that she would spawn radical social communitarian experiments such as Fruitlands or New Harmony;

⁸⁴James Jackson Jarves, The Art-Idea: Sculpture, Painting, and Architecture in America (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1866), Third edition, p. 175.

that radicals like Andrew Jackson would wreak political and economic havoc in the name of democracy. This curious openness to the New World combined with the fear of excess led Terence Martin to conclude that "America was loath to consider itself an infant nation, a new one, but not an infant one."⁸⁵ New to the extent that they felt free from the restrictions and structures of their political past, Americans also strove to avoid the seemingly inevitable chaos of an infant's desire to be free from the limitations and the exigencies of its socio-political environment. They had destroyed enough in their War for Independence. Only those activities which did not threaten the fragile status quo were now acceptable.

The dominant image of cultural newness and the rejection of cultural childhood parallels Merle Curti's observation that in the political sphere, a conservative reaction set in after the heady days of the American Revolution. The revolutionary fervor of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence was bracketed in favor of a politically conservative Constitution, although the Bill of Rights was intended to preserve some of the equalitarian features of the earlier document.

⁸⁵ Martin, op. cit., p. 51. Martin's general analysis of the influence of Scottish thought on American culture is excellent.

Many had never really believed the high-sounding words in the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence. The extreme form in which the doctrines of equality were often stated seemed to many, at least on sober second thought, to make them plain contradictions of common knowledge -- obviously some men were not and never had been equal to others. 86

Though derived from suspicious European models, the new and still tenuous institutions of the New World were to be preserved if only for the sake of stability.

In Scottish thought, Americans

found a convenient escape from the depressing thought that they were an infant nation. . . . an argument for congratulating themselves on escaping cultural childhood. Moreover, it provided them with a moral rationale for conservatism when they were left with no other rationale. It stabilized, it was safe, it discouraged undue speculation, it could be applied as a cohesive force in society. One who went to the Scottish school of philosophy could become the curious anomaly America required -- a man, untrammelled by the past, whose essential concern was to conserve the social order. Almost, we might say, a conservative with nothing to conserve; yet that is the paradox at the center of much of the American experience. . . . With no institutions of past ages, no prejudices to cripple and deform the mind [!], no privileged orders, no hereditary superiority, and no established church, America was stripped right down to its virtue, stripped clean down to its noble virtue. 87

Was it possible to be civilized without the machinery of civilization? Yes, said the Scottish, and those Americans who agreed looked forward to a future

⁸⁶Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 189.

⁸⁷Martin, op. cit.

unencumbered by either the social orders or misplaced ideals of the past. Cultural development could proceed simply by institutionalizing and making available the "correct" tastes, opinions and sentiments of those who had the proper intellectual and aesthetic sensibilities. What generally emerges is a proposition which Americans wanted desperately to believe. Men, in becoming civilized, had gained much more than they had lost. Furthermore, civilization was present even in the act of civilizing which, for all its destruction of primitive virtues (savagism), peoples (native Americans) and environments (wilderness), provided the civilizers with more than what was lost. It was a circular and elitist argument -- "correct" taste and sentiments characterized those who were properly cultured; such culture was at the foundation of civilization; civilization was good because it furthered "correct" taste and sentiments. Such an argument was satisfying, for not only did it

protect the present, but it also more than
made up for the loss of the past by allowing
an unlimited hope for the future, 88

a future dependent only on man's ability and limited only by man's limitations. Fortunately, within the scope of such "correct" tastes and sentiments, man's ability was great and his limitations negligible. Scottish thought served America's hopes for the future and fears about the processes of history. For the cultured elite, it was

⁸⁸Ibid.

practical, comfortable, straightforward and traditional. That was just what those tired of the revolutionary anxiety of the late eighteenth century were seeking. Scottish influence on American culture follows from the observation that it "supported a disposition of Americans to be suspicious of the imagination [and the] imaginative experience."⁸⁹ A large number of leading Americans believed that the New World had had its fill of imaginative Europeans, from the earliest explorers who wrote not about the wilderness they saw, but of an Eden they imagined, to those who discovered in the New World a place to test their political and social fantasies. To the conservative elite, the New World needed a tranquilizer, not a fresh burst of energy and vision. The Scottish philosophy became an aesthetic sedative self-prescribed by a society which desired the very latest in sedation.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 2:
Three Catskill Explorers

Suggesting that it was "the first literary recognition of an entirely new approach to the contemplation of nature,"¹ Hans Huth dates the acceptance of romanticism in the New World with the 1817 publication of Thanatopsis, a poem of praise for the wonders of romantic nature by William Cullen Bryant. Although Bryant's poem was not "entirely" new, Huth's thesis is more responsible than that of Mary E. Woolley who believed that the romantic movement was well established in the United States by the turn of the century.² In her ground-breaking article of 1898, Woolley began by correctly observing that the predominant image of the natural world in European thought until recent times has been negative. "Indifference to wild and mountainous scenery, abhorrence even, continued to be almost universal throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and indeed until after the middle of the eighteenth."³

¹Hans Huth, Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes (Berkeley, CA,: University of California Press, 1957), p. 30.

²Mary E. Woolley, "The Development of the Love of Romantic Scenery in America," American Historical Review III (1898)

³Ibid., p. 56. See also the volumes by Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1959); Christopher Hussey, The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: Cass, 1927); Walter J. Hippie, Jr., The Beautiful, The Sublime and the Picturesque in Eighteenth Century British Aesthetic Theory (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957); and Elizabeth W. Manwaring, Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England: A Study Chiefly of the Influence of Claude Lorraine and Salvator Ross on English Taste 1700-1800 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925).

Until the American Revolution, and except for isolated instances, Woolley finds the Romantic sensibility generally absent from descriptions of praise for the New World by both residents and foreign observers. She correctly states that the expression of wonder and awe at America's natural environment was only sporadic and occasional, certainly not enough to warrant the term "movement." Then, as if almost by magic, "there is little doubt of the general existence of a new sentiment in the cultivated American mind," so that, by 1785, Woolley claims a "new spirit of admiration for wild and romantic scenery became fully established."⁴

For several reasons, Woolley's analysis is inadequate. She rests her argument on the writings of Thomas Jefferson, Jeremy Belknap, Thomas Cooper, Timothy Dwight and Joel Barlow, men wealthy by contemporary standards and all educated in the refinements of European culture. Although perhaps a cross section of the cultured elite of the early Republic, these men were hardly representative of American sensibilities. Woolley's analysis may indicate a developing romanticism by 1785, but hardly a "fully established" movement throughout American cultural life. Even during the nineteenth century, romantic affection for scenery was only one of many American views of the wilderness.

The booster mentality of the lower and middle

⁴Woolley, op. cit., p. 61.

classes and the promise of prosperity to those attracted to the American west did not include an overly sympathetic view of the trees and the mountains which blocked the path of their economic and geographical progress. As Woodrow Wilson so aptly remarked, by far the greater number of Americans were absorbed in the "dull, prosaic tasks imposed upon them by their incomplete civilization."⁵

The wilderness was a challenge, something to be conquered, not a source of beautiful thoughts or a subject for meditation and contemplation. That was a luxury that only those who were urbanely comfortable could afford. Peter J. Schmitt has shown, in his interesting study entitled "The Call of the Wild: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America, 1900-1930"⁶ that at least in the early twentieth century (the same is true for the early nineteenth century), the development of appreciation for the wilderness was largely a curiosity of the urban elite who had the time and energy to devote to such pursuits as the exploration of wild nature. The ease with which they wrote about their experiences is partly mediated by the realization that their material comforts always awaited them on returning to the evils of city life. Thus, the love of romantic

⁵Woodrow Wilson, Division and Reunion 1829-1889 (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1929), p. 6. This volume is in the Series edited by A. B. Hart entitled "Epochs of America."

⁶Peter J. Schmitt, "The Call of the Wild: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America, 1900-1930" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1966).

scenery can hardly be said to have supplanted the "old" attitude -- rather the "new" and the "old" came increasingly into conflict as each became the core of an aesthetic stance about the purpose and destiny of America's wilderness. Certainly the Hellenic reverence for nature never replaced the Judaic command to "fill the earth and conquer it."⁷ As DeToqueville boldly put it.

In Europe, people talk a great deal about the wilds of America, but the Americans themselves never think about them; they are insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature and they may be said not to perceive the mighty forests that surround them until they fall beneath the hatchet. Their eyes are fixed upon another sight: the American people views its own march across these wilds, draining swamps, turning the courses of rivers, peopling solitudes and subduing nature.⁸

Furthermore, Woolley's argument does not recognize the importance of Scottish thought in the cultural life of post-Revolutionary America, and her thesis must therefore be revised. It is not true that by 1785, "a new spirit of admiration for wild and romantic scenery became fully established." What is true is that a curious mix of English Romanticism and Scottish realism informed and became increasingly embodied in images of American scenery. Although Romantic in mood and temperament,

⁷Genesis 1:28.

⁸Alexis DeToqueville, Democracy in America The Henry Reeve text revised by Francis Bowen, now further corrected and edited with introduction, editorial notes, and bibliographies by Phillips Bradley; foreward by Harold J. Laski. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1945), vol. 2, p. 74.

tourists used the structure and language of Common Sense Realism as I shall document in later chapters. Both were readily available to Americans and they took "what was good." But not until 1817 did an American successfully publish a romantic work such as Thanatopsis. And despite its success, it appealed to the intellectual elite. Most Americans, even those who had recently emigrated from Britain's shores, were too busy in the day-to-day business of living to bother with the sanctification of their natural environment.

The influence of Romanticism and Scottish Common Sense Realism was felt most systematically by the intellectual elite. It was also felt by the fashionable elite who did not study European ideas in halls of learning, but travelled in search of the sublime and the beautiful. During the first half of the nineteenth century, they crowded into stage coaches, river steamers and canal boats to take the "Fashionable Tour" from New York City to Niagara Falls, to "behold and wonder" at the scenery of upstate New York. On the Hudson River, they were most taken with the five-state view from Pine Orchard in the Catskills. At Albany, they turned west, the long journey across the state being broken by several minor "natural wonders" and one major one, Trenton Falls. The goal of their "tour" was Niagara Falls, "the greatest natural wonder in the world." By the time tourists reached this spot, they realized that they were on a pilgrimage, not

just a tour. Their trip had become more than just a holiday; it assumed a greater meaning. (Those who merely sought refreshment were satisfied to spend their holidays at Saratoga Springs.) Subdued during the first part of the trip, this meaning is most strikingly revealed at Niagara Falls.

Hoping to capture the wilderness images of early nineteenth century travellers in upstate New York, we shall join them in their tour, ignoring what they ignored, lingering where they lingered. Using diaries and guide-books, we shall attempt to recreate and analyze their imagery.

To illustrate the initial phase of Romantic and Scottish Common Sense influence on fashionable images of upstate New York, it is helpful to introduce moments in the lives of three fashionable American intellectuals who, from the middle of the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, donned their traveller's habits to explore the New York wilderness. Each is a precursor of those who imitated them by taking the "fashionable tour" of New York State's "natural wonders." Each reflects a different mixture of Common Sense cultivation and Romantic naiveté. John Bartram (1699-1777), usually recognized as the "earliest native American botanist,"⁹

⁹William Darlington, Memorials of John Bartram and Humphrey Marshall; with Notices of their Botanical Contemporaries (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1849), p. 37.

was elevated to the position of Botanist to the King (George III) and considered by Linnaeus as the "greatest natural botanist in the world." Samuel Latham Mitchill (1764-1831), known in his day as the "oracle of New York," was the first Professor of Chemistry at Columbia College. Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), President of Yale College, was revered as the "Connecticut Pope." These three men visited wilderness areas in New York State, and reported on their trips in varied and interesting ways.

I

One year before the dawn of the eighteenth century, John Bartram was born into a poor Quaker farmer's family near Darby, Pennsylvania. His first years, like those of many country children, were filled with wonder and curiosity about the natural world around him. But unlike most of his male contemporaries, who were taught that the preoccupations of a child were inappropriate to manhood -- that the duty of a grown man was to acquire property and status, support his family and to serve God -- Bartram could not easily submit to such social expectations. He did raise a family and attended meeting at the local Society of Friends, but rather than seeking material status and recognition, he preferred to explore the North American wilderness. His biographer states that

Although he was bred a farmer, or husbandman, as a means of procuring a subsistence, he pursued his avocation as a philosopher, being ever attentive to the works and operations of Nature. While engaged in ploughing

his fields, and mowing his meadows, his inquisitive eye and mind were frequently exercised in the contemplation of vegetables, the beauty and harmony displayed in their mechanism, the admirable system of order which the great Author of the universe has established throughout their various tribes, and the equally wonderful powers of their generation, the progress of their growth, and the various stages of their maturity and perfection. 10

John Bartram, America's foremost naturalist in his day, travelled to unsurveyed parts of the New World, climbed what were thought to be the highest mountains in the east (the Blue Ridge Mountains), visited Lake Ontario, Lake George, and what are now called the Finger Lakes, tramped the shores of the rivers Hudson, Delaware, Schuylkill, Susquehanna, Alleghany, St. John (Florida) -- all at a time when "it was truly a perilous undertaking to travel in the territories, or even on the frontiers of the aborigines."¹¹ Absorbed with the peculiarities of his immediate environment, he collected specimens for his and other gardens, and amassed botanical, zoological and geological information. The Swedish naturalist Peter Kalm, observed that Bartram

has not written down one-one thousandth part of what he knows. I have often been at a loss to think of the sources from whence he got many of the things that came¹² into his knowledge.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 39.

¹¹Ibid., p. 40.

¹²Peter Kalm, Travels in North America (First published in Sweden in 1753; first English Edition in Warrington, England, 1770). Reprinted in John Pinkerton (ed.) A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting

And this from one of Europe's foremost botanists who himself travelled extensively in North America! Many Europeans were his correspondents -- the English Quaker Peter Collinson (who was responsible for Bartram's designation as Botanist to the King (King George III), Charles Linnaeus, Mark Catesby, Alexander Garden, John Frederick Gronovius, kings, queens, as well as numerous wealthy Europeans who were fashioning luxurious gardens according to the latest picturesque style.¹³ Bartram also maintained a successful farm in Pennsylvania. Adjacent to it, he reportedly had the most extensive North American botanical garden of the eighteenth century which attracted such notables as Benjamin Franklin, George Washington and famous European travellers who came to rest and philosophize in this simple, yet idyllic, pastoral environment.

To Europeans, Bartram was best known for what Alf Evers impishly calls his "plant of the month club." As Peter Collinson explained,

Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World; Many of Which Are Now First Translated into English (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, etc., 1808-1814), vol. XIII, p. 413. Peter Kalm is reported to have been Linnaeus' favorite pupil.

¹³For a basic introduction to English landscape gardening, see Edward Greenway Malins, English Landscaping and Literature, 1660-1840 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); Miles Hadfield, Gardening in Britain (London: Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., 1960); Ralph Dutton, The English Garden (London: B.T. Botsford, Ltd., 1937).

I employed him to collect seeds, -- 100 species in a box at Five Guineas each from the year 1735 to this year 1760 about 20 boxes a year one with another which I have to oblige the curious in planting . . . 14 among the Nobility and Gentry.

It is no exaggeration to say that Bartram was an employee of Collinson, for he supplied both seeds and botanical information to Collinson's clearinghouse for natural history. The rich and informative correspondence between these two men indicates how dependent Bartram was upon the financial remuneration he received through this novel arrangement. As it was, Bartram complained bitterly of his precarious financial situation due to notoriously late payments, particularly by the European royalty. Without Collinson's moral and administrative support, it is questionable whether or not Bartram could have afforded the excursions into the wilderness that he made. A letter from Bartram to Collinson dated December 18, 1742 is revealing.

¹⁴ J.E. Danby (ed.), The Sloan Herbarium (London: The British Museum, 1858), p. 89. Quoted by Alf Evers, The Catskills from Wilderness to Woodstock (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1972), p. 78.

I have been with our ingenious friend Cadwallader Colden who treated me very civilly He advised me to travel into the Mohawk's country, and to Oswego and the lakes [Great Lakes] -- and he said he would recommend me to the inhabitants there. But I suppose that the death of our dear friend Lord Petrie [sic] will discourage such distant travels; and our Americans have not zeal enough to encourage any discoveries of this kind at their expense. ¹⁵

John Bartram took his son William (1739-1823) on his fourth excursion into the Catskills, his favorite place for studying and collecting the seeds of trees. Recording his adventures on horseback in the sparing and brief language of A Journey to ye Cats Kill Mountains with billy 1753, John reflected that "I took this road [across the Blue or Catskill Mountains] to show my son

¹⁵Darlington, op. cit., pp. 161-62. Coldenham (or Coldenham) on the banks of the Hudson River near what is now Newburgh, was a center of botanical activity in the Northeast, and served as the headquarters for Bartram's four excursions into the Catskill Mountains. Cadwallader Colden (1688-1776), Surveyor-General of New York for decades and Lt. Governor from 1761-1776 was an avid botanist whose Plantae coldenhamiae was the first treatise on the flora of New York State. His daughter, Jane Colden (1724-1766) was the first prominent woman botanist in the United States. She mastered the Linnaean system of classification (probably tutoring John Bartram in its intricacies) and was highly praised by such colleagues as Peter Collinson and Alexander Garden. See further Vail, "Jane Colden, an Early New York Botanist," Torrey, A Monthly Journal of Botanical Notes and News VII (1907), pp. 21-34. Lord Robert Petre (misspelled Petrie by Bartram), the son of the Seventh Lord Petre, died of smallpox on July 2, 1742 at the age of thirty. "A Roman Catholic Peer of Large Estate and extensive Charity," [Gentleman's Magazine, vol. XII (1742), London: Printed by Edward Cave at St. John's Gate, p. 387], he is reported to have had the greatest garden in Britain with over 10,000 American plants and an insatiable desire for new and unusual species.

the broken, mountainous, desolate part of the country.¹⁶ Since William was only fourteen years old at the time, this must have been one of the first of his many extended and illustrious excursions into the American wilderness. Yet this, and the fact that it led to the first mention of the Catskills in popular American literature¹⁷ are not the only reasons why this trip is interesting and instructive.

The timing for the Bartram's trip to the Catskills (September) was determined by the need to collect Balsam Fir (Balm of Gilead tree) seeds for his plant of the month club subscribers in Britain. Yet an equally important botanical reason (discounting the understandable paternal desire to show his son the "broken, mountainous and desolate part of the country and introduce him to friends at Coldenham) was the opportunity to study the Catskill's

¹⁶Darlington, *Ibid.*, p. 195. Samuel Mitchill reports that the "Catskills are partly in Ulster and partly in Albany county. They are commonly known by the name of Blue Mountains, on account of the blueness or haze which they present to the eye when seen from a distance. They are likewise called the Kaats-Kill Mountains from a river of that name which issues from them and falls into the Hudson a little below Lunenburg. They are considered, perhaps with truth, the highest in the State of New-York; and though by reason of their remoteness, not visible by mariners arriving on the coast, are however to be seen from a great distance indeed. [Samuel Latham Mitchill, "A Sketch of the Mineralogical History of the State of New York" The Medical Repository, vol. I, #3 (1798), p. 308.]

¹⁷William Bartram, The Travels of William Bartram (New York: Dover Publications, n.d.), p. 224. This is a reprint of the 1791 highly popular classic account of Bartram's travels in the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida. See also Evers, op. cit., p. 73.

evergreens, oaks and hickories so that he could compare those of the "York Government" with those of his native Pennsylvania. To Collinson he wrote that his goal was to examine the

true distinguishing character of our forest trees, finding it a very difficult task -- and [I] have no help from either ancient or modern authors, they having taken no particular observation worth notice. 18

"Particular observation" to reveal the "true distinguishing character" of his specimens -- this was the burden of Bartram's ground-breaking botanical endeavors. Unexplained geological curiosities and zoological observations also commanded Bartram's attention. Why were there marine shells on mountaintops? Why was the late summer the best season to collect balsam fir seeds? Observation of the particular and information gathering served as the basis for the limited, though significant reflections which survive of Bartram's excursions to the Catskills. Observations on ye Katts Kill Mountains, the "first account of the Catskills from the point of view of the naturalist,"¹⁹ is interesting primarily for its bold geological hypotheses. There is little more than that, for there is little overt evidence of the romantic wonder and sentimentality which later affected images of the Catskills. Bartram's language and style is straightforward, dry, and factual, even if a radical attempt to

¹⁸Darlington, op. cit., p. 145.

¹⁹Evers, op. cit., p. 94.

explain the geological forces that shaped the area.

Two occasions on that 1753 excursion may further indicate something about Bartram's sensibilities. As I shall have ample opportunity to observe in later chapters, a central feature of the ideal romantic landscape was the sublime or beautiful waterfall. At the time of Bartram's fourth visit to the Catskills, "landscape gardens of Britain were in the early, madly enthusiastic stages of the cult of the waterfall."²⁰ Not only were natural waterfalls prized, but waterfalls were constructed in astonishing numbers to increase the sublimity of an already artificial landscape. Bartram had heard that a large double waterfall (the preferred kind) existed near the balsam fir grove where he proposed to collect his seeds, and he was determined to visit the site.

Bartram did visit the waterfall, and he introduced to European aesthetes through Peter Collinson what later became known as the Great Falls of the Kaaterskill, loudly and widely praised by early nineteenth century fashionable tourists and "nature lovers" as the most sublime and wonderful waterfall along the majestic Hudson between New York and Albany.²¹ Yet despite his "eager desire" to see this geological structure, Bartram's response to it pales in comparison with those of tourists who later made the

²⁰Ibid., p. 91. See also the material on English gardens listed in footnote 13.

²¹See chapter 3.

journey to the Falls. Rather than glorify its beauty and its sublimity; rather than compose a poem on its uplifting character, Bartram drew a diagram. He measured its height as best he could be estimating how long it took for a stone to drop to the bottom of the falls. There is no expression of awe, wonder, or worshipful feeling that later attended visitors to the Falls. For Bartram, the Great Falls of the Kaaterskill was simply an interesting geological phenomenon which deserved accurate and "particular observation."

If John Bartram's reaction to the Kaaterskill Falls is any index to his pre-romantic sensibilities, no less so is the retrospectively curious omission of any reference to the celebrated view from "Pine Orchard" (the grove where he collected his balsam fir seeds) in the immediate neighborhood of the Falls. Known in the nineteenth century for its five-state view to the east and as the location of the Catskill Mountain House built in 1823, Pine Orchard became the most important mountain retreat for nature lovers prior to the Civil War. Bartram was there, yet he makes no mention of the scenery. We must assume that it impressed him little, if at all. "Particular observation" remained more important than the grand view. As Evers says,

Among his British subscribers a few advanced souls were beginning to become initiated into the meaning of a view from a mountaintop . . . were beginning to elevate views from mountaintops into symbols of infinity, of the vastness of the universe into which man was thrust, of the relationship of the human individual to

the stars, to the daisies and the bright-eyed mice, and the things that the microscope showed to be wriggling in a drop of ditch water. In September of 1753, all these meanings had not yet crystallized in the unconscious mind of western Europeans to be ready to spring instantly into consciousness when stimulated by an extensive view from a mountaintop. If John Bartram glanced at the view from Pine Orchard, he did no more than that and passed on. Another forty years would have to pass before the view from the cliff adjoining the vale of the twin lakes would be able to seize human minds and emotions with irresistible force.

22

Only later would Pine Orchard and surrounding natural wonders become one of the cherished Romantic spots of the world. The eye and mind of John Bartram was considerably different from those of nineteenth century men and women who made Pine Orchard the enchanted spot around which legends crystallized and the world of nature became a thing of magic.

Yet, despite these reflections of hindsight, John Bartram's 1753 sensibilities were fresh and inspiring to a good many contemporary naturalists, domestic and foreign, who imitated his example to a lesser degree. As "America's greatest natural botanist," he distinguished himself in the field -- in the wilderness of North America. He was not bookish and scholarly as were Linnaeus and Gronovius, but untrained, instinctive, utilitarian, renowned for a

²²Evers, op. cit., p. 96. Evers seems to rest his judgment that "forty years would have to pass" on the hypothesis of Mary E. Woolley (see footnote 2) which he cites as evidence for this statement. I disagree with Evers' estimate of forty years for the same reasons I disagree with Woolley (see pages 2 and 3). I believe that Evers would be on safer ground with an estimate of sixty years.

quick eye, a sense of the unusual, and an uncanny knack for finding that which he sought. As a naturalist, he was a discoverer of details, not a synthesizer; a collector of specific information, not one given to theoretical constructs. What he established for the American scientific community was the importance of detailed knowledge and the habit of observation.

I have called Bartram a naturalist, not a scientist and I do so with reason. Although during the eighteenth century, the terms "scientist" and "naturalist" were used interchangeably, for the purposes of analysis, historians of science usually make a distinction between them. William Martin Smallwood makes the distinction clear.

Few naturalists made . . . lasting generalizations. In fact, these eager students of nature pretty generally failed to recognize the importance of the fundamental discoveries that had already been made. The period of the naturalist was too slow in accepting new ideas . . . The naturalists began by recording facts about rocks, plants and animals long before scientific standards had been thought to be significant. The ideas of the early naturalist resemble those of the present day scientist, but they differ from those of the true scientist . . . because they do not demand that observation, classification and verification precede deduction . . . In short, the naturalist fitted his explanations to the current philosophy for his period, while the scientist lays the foundation for the philosophy of the next generation.

23

²³ William Martin Smallwood, Natural History and the American Mind (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. viii. See further Smallwood, chapter 8 entitled "The Philosophy of the Naturalist," pp. 215-247. Surprisingly, Smallwood succumbs to the temptation to use the terms interchangeably

And what was the "current philosophy?" Certainly it would be inaccurate to make a direct connection between Bartram and Scottish Common Sense, for the specific period of Scottish influence on American cultural life occurred in the fifty years after the American War for Independence. Bartram's botanical excursions, however, were contemporaneous with the hesitant beginnings of Scottish Common Sense Realism as a conscious and distinct philosophical movement. Bartram's close relationship with and reliance on the British elite, supported by an extensive correspondence and numerous personal contacts with Britishers who visited the "greatest natural botanist" of the age, suggests that the milieu in which Bartram thought about the natural world was similar to that of the Scottish Universities.

Bartram's intellectual and aesthetic biases were similar to those which found expression in the systematic philosophy of Thomas Reid (1710-1796), Lord Kames (1696-1782) and other Scottish University Professors. More specifically, Bartram's concern for "particular observation" and the myriad details of the concrete world -- actual plants, actual wilderness -- is precisely that which was being raised to primary epistemological importance by the Scottish. Bartram's intuitive, utilitarian mode, while in his analysis of the "Natural History Period," which he dates in North America from 1725 to 1840.

characteristically American, also coheres with the prevalent Scottish mood. And more specifically, Bartram's visit to the Great Falls of the Kaaterskill was accomplished not so much for the personal pleasure of seeing them as to investigate and record them for posterity. Through Bartram's efforts, Peter Collinson, and through him a great number of European naturalists and travellers, might become aware of another geological phenomenon to witness and study. Bartram's effort was in the cause of greater knowledge and information, not heightened romantic feeling. Bartram worked on the assumption that knowledge heightened aesthetic pleasure.

Bartram focussed on the outer rather than the inner world -- he did not record any experiences in which an outer actual reality ignited latent inner emotions. Rather, he remained happily content with all the marvelous physical detail of God's world, for nature was thought to be the best manifestation we have of God's glory and benevolence. Man was in his place -- as the discoverer and cataloguer of interesting information. For Bartram the naturalist, collecting sufficient quantities of botanical information remained a satisfying human goal. The legitimate interpretation and use of that information could not be appropriately questioned, for it was assumed that such information would cohere with and exhibit the truth of the "current philosophy" and theology. Not surprisingly, Bartram included a quotation by Alexander Pope, the

contemporary classicist, over the door to his greenhouse,

Slave to no sect, who takes no private
road, But looks through nature, up to
Nature's God.

"Through nature" -- Bartram preserves the separation between God and nature, thereby avoiding the later tendency to identify nature with God. Bartram would not challenge divinity by presuming to contemplate Nature's "Grand Design," for he had no desire to synthesize or unify his knowledge.

Bartram was overwhelmed by the American wilderness -- not by its majesty and grandeur, but rather by its detail. He did not feel threatened or enfeebled by the enormous abundance of God's creation, by the expansive five-state view from Pine Orchard or the wondrous Great Falls of the Kaaterskill. The "littleness of man, greatness of nature" mood which characterized later Romantic sensibilities is absent from Bartram's temperament. The "greatness of nature" did not threaten the "greatness of man." Bartram summarized his stance in a letter to Collinson dated December 3, 1762:

My head runs all upon the work of God, in
nature. It is through the telescope that I 24
see God in his glory.

Nature, for Bartram, was a personal affair, not something mediated through the printed word, or under controlled laboratory conditions. He was preoccupied with

²⁴ Darlington, op. cit., p. 243.

activity, with the exploration of an American wilderness that "haunted his mind and magnetized him." The overwhelming untamed opulence of "nature's nation" demanded his personal attention. The lure of the wilderness -- "its thoughtless random abundance, the toilsomeness of all progress through it, the thrust to go on" landed him in the center of a developing Western interest in natural history.²⁵ Rather than "conquer and subdue," or romanticize and beautify, Bartram found his response in a desire to collect and preserve both its variety and diversity and to engage in the "particular observation" of God's creation.

II

The extraordinary career of Samuel Latham Mitchill (1764-1831) is an instructive contrast to that of John Bartram. Bartram focussed on two aspects of natural history -- botany, his personal preference, and geology. Mitchill on the other hand came as close as any naturalist to embodying the whole range of interests which constituted natural history. But what was natural history? Howard Mumford Jones has observed that "in the flush times of getting a brand-new nation underway words became surcharged

²⁵ Donald Culross Peattie, Green Laurels: The Lives and Achievements of the Great Naturalists (New York: n.p., 1936), p. 199. See also Ernest Earnest, John and William Bartram, Botanists and Explorers 1699-1777, 1739-1823 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940).

with emotion rather than with meaning." Concern about the specific subject matter of "natural history" or even "botany" remained the almost exclusive domain of Noah Webster in an age when "science meant, vaguely, any form of organized learning" and the "arts included everything from invention and manufacture to epic poetry and historical painting."²⁶ Thus, when a reviewer of Benjamin Waterhouse's The Botanist (1811), a collection of twenty lectures given at Brown and Cambridge Universities, defined "natural history," he must have startled all of his readers except perhaps the founder and editor-in-chief of the journal in which the review appeared -- Mr. Mitchill. As late as 1812, the reviewer could write in the Medical Repository, the first journal of medicine published in the United States,

Natural history may be termed from its vast and almost unlimited extent, a nomen generalissimum; a term comprehending a cluster of sciences and a grand aggregate of knowledge. Botany, Mineralogy, and Zoology, are three of its branches; and Medicine, extensive as it is, is only an appendage to Zoology, containing the history of diseases to which animals are subjected unless, indeed, the maladies of plants be considered as referable to the same. 27

Implied in this definition as well as in the book

²⁶Howard Mumford Jones, O Strange New World, American Culture: The Formative Years (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 345.

²⁷"Review of The Botanist by Benjamin Waterhouse," The Medical Repository, 3d Hexade, III (1812), p. 371.

reviewed is an important distinction in the field of natural history, a distinction made transparent by the wholly different professional lives of John Bartram and Samuel Mitchill. Bartram, who initially was exposed to the natural world as a poor uneducated farmer's son, developed his mature botanical interests and expertise partly in response to the aesthetic desires of wealthy European horticulturalists and book-bound naturalists. Mitchill summarized Bartram's contribution with uncharacteristic brevity and accuracy.

an indefatigable and excellent self-taught botanistHe made great progress in discovering beautiful, new, and useful plants, and in placing them in his ground, where they were multiplied, and beheld by his visitors. He became known thereby to the scientific gentlemen of his time, in his own country, and shortly after to the lovers of natural history in foreign partsmay justly be considered one of the most distinguished persons who enriched the eastern world with the vegetables of the west. 28

As Mitchill correctly observed Bartram's botanical endeavors were broadly within an agricultural context. Plants were studied for their utility in the promotion of agriculture, whether ornamental or vegetable. Bartram's botany was a functional art -- useful and agreeable, even if disorganized and somewhat tedious.

Samuel Mitchill's background was quite different.

²⁸ Mitchill, Samuel Latham, "Discourse Delivered on the 6th of December, 1813 to the New-York Historical Society," Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1814 (New York: Van Winkle and Wiley, 1814), Vol. II, p. 186.

Although also born into a Quaker farmer's family (on Long Island), his ambitions extended far beyond following in his father's footsteps. He was tutored in the classics and graduated with high honors in medicine from the University of Edinburgh in 1786. After a year of travel on the European continent, he returned to New York, a commercial town with surprisingly limited intellectual curiosity about the natural world and minimal cultural affluence compared to Philadelphia and Boston.²⁹ Mitchill was learned and bookish in the European manner - a physician whose inquisitive spirit about the natural world logically drew him to pharmacology. Although interested in agriculture (along with everything else), his botanical endeavors were tinged, in a way that Bartram's were not, with a medical concern for anatomy and the medicinal qualities of plants. Botany was becoming less an art and more a science.

Samuel Mitchill's insatiable curiosity knew no bounds. As such, his life constitutes a microcosm of the times. Mitchill was an active and often presiding member of over fifty societies for the promotion of agriculture, medicine, museums, arts and sciences -- societies which

²⁹ The first cultural movement of any contemporary significance in New York did not emerge until a small group of literary nationalists known as the Knickerbockers (Joseph Rodman Drake, Fitz-Greene Halleck, Washington Irving and William Cullen Bryant being the most conspicuous) rose to prominence after the first decade of the nineteenth century. Mitchill enjoyed their friendship, but he was an older man of a different era.

functioned as the leading means of learning and disseminating information in the early days of the Republic.³⁰ Politically, he used his informal legal training in "negotiating" Indian claims in western New York State and serving as a member of the New York Legislature (1791), the United States House of Representatives (1801-1804, 1810-1813) and the United States Senate (1804-1809). He founded in 1797 with Edward Miller and Elihu H. Smith and edited until 1824, The Medical Repository. Although his scientific endeavors were not oriented around practical invention as were the efforts of Benjamin Franklin or Robert Fulton (who, to his subsequent glory, Mitchill vigorously supported in the New York Legislature), Mitchill's prolific writings on all topics helped make natural history fashionable. His rather less utilitarian mold should not be interpreted to imply that Mitchill worked on fundamental problems or that any of his discoveries were significant scientifically, for they were not. But partly because his scientific achievements were more quantitative than qualitative, he contributed to a slight shift in the cultural orientation towards things natural. For his times this was a significant achievement.³¹

³⁰Courtney Robert Hall, A Scientist in the Early Republic: Samuel Latham Mitchill, 1764-1831 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), pp. 129-31.

³¹Much of Mitchill's output is unavailable to historians because of a fire shortly after his death.

The extent of Mitchill's activities and the broad range of his experience make it no wonder that he was referred to as the "Nestor of American Science" and by Governor Dewitt Clinton as the "Delphic Oracle of New York." Other politicians were similarly in awe of his learning -- he was a "stalking library" to John Randolph and a "Congressional Dictionary" to President Thomas Jefferson.³² His reputed wisdom and infallibility in matters scientific easily became the source of much ridicule. Philip Hone (1780-1851), Whig activist and Mayor of New York for one year (1825) eulogized him somewhat caustically.

Wed. Sept. 7, 1831 -- Died this afternoon, Dr. Samuel Latham Mitchill . . . Few men of our country have been more distinguished for scientific and literary acquirements, and no American was better known among the literature of foreign countries. But he was always an eccentric man. Possessed of an uncommon degree of knowledge, he was strangely deficient in that useful commodity called common sense, and for several years past he was a confirmed drunkard, and it would have been better for his posthumous fame if he had died earlier. 33

On July 9, 1792, Mitchill was elected to the just established Chair of "Natural History, Chemistry, Agriculture and Other Arts" at Columbia College, a position he resigned in 1801 to accept a seat in the Congress. The Professorship included responsibility for

³²Hall, op. cit., p. 13-14.

³³Philip Hone, The Diary of Philip Hone, edited, with an introduction by Allan Nevins (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927), Vol. I, p. 46.

The Philosophical Doctrines of Chemistry and Natural History, under the following heads: 1. Geology, or the natural and chemical History of the Earth; 2. Meteorology, or the natural and chemical History of the Atmosphere; 3. Hydrology, or the natural and chemical history of Waters; 4. Mineralogy, or the natural and chemical History of Plants; 6. Zoology, or the natural and chemical History of Animals. 34

Mitchill described his subject as "Economics," by which he meant the "classification and arrangement of natural bodies, but[which]also treats a great variety of facts [forming]the basis of medicine, agriculture and other useful arts as well as manufactures."³⁵ Fifteen years later (1807), he took up his duties at the College of Physicians and Surgeons as Professor of Chemistry. The following year he was transferred to the Chair in Natural History which he held until 1820 when he was again transferred -- this time to botany and materia medica.

Despite Mitchill's extensive part-time activities and interests, he is usually remembered for his work in natural history -- work informed by an excellent medical education at Edinburgh and supported by academic responsibilities at two of Columbia's colleges. They provide the

³⁴"Outline of Professor Mitchill's Lectures in Natural History," The Medical Repository, 3d Hexade, Vol. I, p. 266.

³⁵Samuel Latham Mitchill, The Present State of Learning in the College of New York (New York: n.p., 1794), p. 9. See also J. H. Van Amringe, An Historical Sketch of Columbia College, in the City of New York, 1754-1876 (New York: n.p., 1876).

professional context for his various pronouncements on the natural world and man's relation to it. However, most of Mitchill's extant field observations are contained in published "orations," "discourses" and "addresses" to various societies of which he was a member or are reports of commissioned investigations.³⁶

Three botanical addresses are of varying interest. Mitchill accurately described his Discourse Delivered on the 6th of December, 1813 to the New-York Historical Society as a "concise and comprehensive account of the writings which illustrate the botanical history of North and South America."³⁷ Detailed and erudite, it constitutes a major bibliographical effort. Mitchill appropriately starts with the Biblical creation story in his "botanical history." According to the tradition, "this display he has given of his works. . . . [which] were the result of [his] wonderful power. . . . pleased the Almighty."³⁸ In including the report of John Bartram's 1743 trip to Lake Ontario,³⁹

³⁶ Some of his more detailed scientific work is preserved in class related materials (class notes, course outlines, etc.) in the Columbia University Library.

³⁷ Samuel Latham Mitchill, "A Discourse Delivered on the 6th of December, 1813 to the New-York Historical Society," Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1814 (New York: Van Winkle and Wiley, 1814), Vol. II.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

³⁹ Mitchill refers to John Bartram, Observations on the Inhabitants, Climate, Soil, Divers Productions, Animals, etc. Made in His Travels from Pensilvania to Onondaga, Oswego and the Lake Ontario, in Canada. Originally published in London in 1751, this volume has been reproduced as Reprint #41 in the March of America Facsimile

Mitchill observes only that "the botanical information it contains goes not far beyond the plants and trees of spontaneous growth along the line of his march."⁴⁰ Most interesting is his summary, especially for its unusual reference to the autumnal colors of the American landscape. For reasons that are unclear, there is infrequent mention of fall foliage in written descriptions of the physical landscape during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and almost no images of the American autumn projected onto canvas. Spring and summer greens predominate. Mitchill's 1813 reference is significant therefore not only as a prediction of an unusual source of national pride but also because of its boldness in asserting the value of color in landscape. Mitchill asks,

What shall be said of American plants after all this? Why, truly, that as, during the verdant period, they surpass those which grow in other quarters of the globe, so they excell in the peculiar beauty and variety of the autumnal hues, whereby our forests exhibit, during the season in which the leaves are preparing to fall, a spectacle of richness and gayety that all persons of observation admire, and which our artists might pourtray [sic] for the purpose of giving a national style and character to their landscape. 41

In an 1826 Address, Delivered to the Horticultural Society of New York at Their Annual Celebration, Mitchill displays a concern which rarely surfaced, that of

Series (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966).

⁴⁰Mitchill, "Discourse of 1813," op. cit., p. 187.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 215.

preserving the natural life of the United States. Although he initially made some predictable remarks about how man has "transformed the face of nature," towards the end of his speech, his tone changed and he strongly urged his friends to cultivate an affection for trees and help stay further "cruel and unrelenting proceedings which are fast thinning their numbers, and threatening some of their races with extermination."⁴² Such vigorous language on behalf of preservation was highly unusual in 1826.

Yet thirty-four years earlier, in an Oration Delivered Before the Agricultural Society (January 10, 1792), Mitchill had clearly identified his image of the American landscape with the prevailing American sensibility. Invoking classical pastoral imagery and example, he assumed that there was a "natural propensity in the human mind to be pleased with the scenery and prospects of the country--- [its] breezes and trees. . . .vallies [sic] and brooks. . . . shepards and their flocks. . . .A country retreat becomes an Elysium. . . .an Arcadia or a Paradise." Mitchill's oration quickly turned into a hymn of praise for the American yeoman, much in the Jeffersonian mood. Knowing God's will and trusting in human effort, Mitchill pointed to the "abundant harvest" which results from the "industry of the American farmer. . . .the fertility of the land. . . .

⁴²Samuel Latham Mitchill, Address, Delivered to the Horticultural Society of New York, on Their Annual Celebration, August 29, 1826 (New York: n.p.), pp. 6-22.

the favorableness of the weather. . . .[and the] wholesomeness of the situation."⁴³ With this idealistic introduction, Mitchill then launched into a bitter critique of the pre-pastoral wilderness. "How desolate, how prostrate is a country until improved by the hand of industry!" Referring to days before the arrival of the European, Mitchill raised the specter of the untamed savage in saying that

rude men and wild beasts roamed in scanty number thro' the pathless wilderness, and possessed a wider range of commonage than according to just distribution they were entitled to. . . .The newcomers drained, under nature's universal character, a part of that land which the natives possessed exclusively in too great a proportion. . . . ancient pines and oaks fell beneath the strokes of the axe, ravenous wolves and tigers [!] forsook their abodes, and in the midst of a desert waste and wild, the hardy adventurers scooped out a dwelling place. Where lately briars and nettles deformed the spot, the consuming operation of fire prepared the earth for the reception of wheat and rice. . . .Orchards. . . .sprung up where not long since the toxicodendren emitted its poisonous vapors. The horse, the cow, the swine and the sheep succeeded the destructive beasts of the forest; and where the savage hornet formerly took his dreary flights, the honeybee, over the meadows of blooming clover, collects her sweets. I see the settlers in their progress from the Atlantic coasts collect the peltry and lumber of woods into vast magazines. I see them hew out roads, drain swamps, build bridges, and construct millsI see the wilderness everywhere they go, changing to a civilized country, and smiling with plenty. 44

⁴³Samuel Latham Mitchill, "An Oration Delivered Before the Agricultural Society on January 10, 1792," Transactions of the Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Arts and

Such an account of America's pre-European past -- before the benefits of western civilization -- was a familiar cultural strain in the early Republic, and Mitchill simply adds his voice to the prevailing sentiment. What is different is that Mitchill knew whereof he spoke -- he gave the political and ideological argument a botanical and zoological stamp of legitimacy. But he also had the botanical knowledge to understand that the "unrelenting proceedings" he promoted in 1792 had proceeded sufficiently so that in 1826, he could warn the Horticultural Society that they had become "cruel."⁴⁵ Mitchill was not inextricably wedded to the dominant cultural image of the American landscape.

The "wonder-working effects of American industry" had threatened the North American wilderness to the extent that Mitchill feared the "extermination" of species upon which he as a natural historian depended. It was a significant change of heart -- born from observing the "proceedings" of an infant nation, but nourished by a developing romanticism, first exhibited just four years after his Agricultural Society speech and thirty years before that

Manufactures, (New York: Childs and Swain, 1798, published by order of the Society), Vol. I, part 1, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 5-6. Toxicodendron is a genus of twenty species comprising poison ivy, poison sumac, etc. characterized by foliage poisonous to the touch.

⁴⁵ See pages 87-88 on the Horticultural Society speech.

to the Horticultural Society. In 1796, because of his position as secretary of the Society for the Promotion of the Useful Arts, Mitchill was commissioned by the society to examine the Catskill Mountains for possible coal reserves. Mitchill's report, "A Sketch of the Mineralogical History of New York State," was printed in three parts in The Medical Repository for 1798 and 1800.⁴⁶

Alf Evers overstates the case in saying that "when he climbed the Catskills, Mitchill carried with him the romantic way of seeing nature," and the "readers of The Medical Repository found the Catskills presented in its pages for the first time with very much the appearance the mountains would have to the eyes of the next three generations." While it may have been true that because of his student days in Scotland, "no American of his time was better equipped than the doctor to persuade the world to begin seeing the Catskills as a region of romantic and scenic charm,"⁴⁷ we cannot conclude therefore, that Mitchill's visit in 1796 was attended by or issued in a mature romantic sentimentality. However, Mitchill visited some of the areas visited by John Bartram forty-three years earlier, and it is clear from his recorded reactions that romantic feeling was making its way into the American

⁴⁶Samuel Latham Mitchill, "A Sketch of the Mineralogical History of the State of New York," The Medical Repository, Vol. I, #3, pp. 293-315; Vol. I, #4, pp. 445-452; Vol. III, #4, pp. 325-335.

⁴⁷Evers, op. cit., p. 275.

consciousness. This was an era of hesitant beginnings, not glorious climaxes.

Like most subsequent reports of tourists to the Catskills, Mitchill's begins by commenting on the Hudson River, particularly the region around the Highlands.

It must be remarked. . . .that the channel, worn or torn by the river through these ridges of granite, exhibits much rude and picturesque scenery; and that the rolling off of rocks, and the crumbling down of hills, by the separation of natural or spontaneous causes, has spread through this region more than usual irregularity and disorder. 48

Mitchill also reports on two aspects of the mountains -- the intimacy of their foliage and the expansiveness of their view. This is significant, for it combines the Scottish Common Sense concern for detail which we noticed in Bartram with a developing Romantic taste for the Grand Scene.

[The mountain's] nakedness is relieved by the coat of mosses and by shrubs, bushes and capillary plants, springing out of their cracks and crevices, wherever they can adhere or assert their roots; as well as by the tall and stately trees which cover the space between the top of one precipice and the bottom of the next. 49

When he gets to the top of the mountain (in this case, Round Top), the focus changes. Shifting from the immediate flora on the mountain, Mitchill describes the surrounding countryside as a "map." Their "bird's-eye view of the hills, vales, woods and plantations. . . .notwithstanding

⁴⁸Mitchill, "Sketch," Vol. I, #4, p. 300.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 309.

their inequality and roughness, appeared quite like a plain. . . .⁵⁰[affording] a curious and amusing spectacle."

Mitchill, in mentioning the third major element of the Catskillian landscape, later highly prized by the romantic "nature lover," again focuses on the details of his immediate environment rather than on the scene as a whole. On the sides of one waterfall (possibly what later became known as Haines Falls), Mitchill muses with botanical accuracy, increased romantic feeling and a sharp sense for things to come.

The mosses, maidenhairs, strawberries, sumacks, and spruces which have fixed themselves here give the scene a very lively and pleasant air. . . . Among the fragments, which by the undermining of the water below, are, from time to time, breaking off in masses of many tons weight, and rushing to the bottom, and some of which are now hanging almost in equipoise, just ready to drop, the most luxuriant vegetation keeps out of sight the bare and disordered appearance and, in a good degree, conceals behind its perpetual foliage, these ruinous and wreck-like appearances of nature. . . . From the edge of the bank, a little way off, where several large trees afford a firm hold, securing the spectator from slipping, a tolerable view can be obtained. There is something in it exceedingly picturesque, which, under the pencil of an artist, would afford a sketch possessing much novelty and peculiarity.

51

A second waterfall, which Mitchill identifies as "Mitchell's Falls" (named after Dr. John Mitchell [d. 1768], a cartographer and botanist whom Mitchill is known to have

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 313.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 311.

highly respected), he describes in slightly more expansive terms.⁵²

Exactly at the precipice, the mountain seems to have been rent asunder, and receding to the right and left, leaves between its enormous and craggy piles, a deep and dreadful opening. . . .the whole bend is full of prospect, extending like a vast amphitheatre, from its commencement, just on the right hand, to its termination, by the intervening objects at the other extreme. . . .To look from the projecting layer of stone which forms the brink, it is too dangerous for the most steady head. . . . Mitchill lay prone upon the rock, and then crept forward until the precipice was fairly before his eyes; and while he was. . . .held by the feet, he got as perfect an idea as he could of that part of the scenery. . . .it may be safely observed, that though the quantity of water is less, these falls are more worth seeing than those of Passaick (sic), the Cohoes, or the upper ones of the Mohawk.

53

III

The word spread slowly. Other Americans began to explore the Catskills -- some to display their cultural prominence as travellers, some to seek their financial prominence as speculators, and some simply to nourish their tentative appetite for romantic scenery. Yet the particular "beauty" of the same Kaaterskill Falls which Bartram and Mitchill had noticed earlier in their wilderness wanderings increasingly elicited a response which transcended these motives. It became renowned as a "natural

⁵²It is very possible, in fact probable, that this Falls later became known as the Great Falls of the Kaaterskill, the same one that John Bartram hastened to visit before collecting his Balsam Fir seeds.

⁵³Mitchill, "Sketch," Vol. #4, pp. 311-312.

wonder" and Fulton's steamboat (introduced in 1809) made it remarkably accessible to an increasingly restless and important urban area of the infant nation.

In 1815, nineteen years after Mitchill's "Sketch: of New York State's mineralogical history for the Society for the Preservation of the Useful Arts, Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), Congregational divine and President of Yale College from 1795 to 1817, during which he was the dominant figure in the established order of Connecticut, visited Pine Orchard and its environs. Entering the Catskills at the town of Catskill, Dwight took the tortuous "turnpike" up the mountain, ascending "partly on horse, partly on foot."⁵⁴

At the head of this valley stood a precipice; here descending perpendicularly, there overhanging with a stupendous and awful grandeur. Over a bed of stone beside our feet ran a stream, which discharged the waters of the lakes [Twin Lakes at Pine Orchard], and from the brow of the precipice rushed in a perpendicular torrent perfectly glittering and white nearly three hundred feet in length. This magnificent current, after dashing upon a shelf, falls over a second precipice of one hundred feet: whence it vanishes in the midnight beneath and rolls over a succession of precipices

⁵⁴ It is not clear whether Dwight visited this spot prior to 1815. He is known to have visited Fort Montgomery in 1778 during his tenure as a Chaplain in the Continental Army, but there is no evidence, i.e. to my knowledge of his precise itinerary. Thus, to my knowledge, there is no evidence that Dwight visited the environs of Pine Orchard during his days as a Chaplain, and furthermore, no evidence that he visited this area during his 1804 visit to the Catskills. The freshness of Dwight's description of the Falls (see pages 27-28) would seem to indicate that he first visited Pine Orchard in 1815.

until it finally escapes from the mountains and empties its waters into the river Kaaterskill. A cloud of vapour raised by the dashing of this stream on the successive shelves in its bed, rises above the forests which shrouded the bottom of the valley, and, winds beautifully away from the sight until it finally vanishes in the bewildered course of this immense chasm. On the bosom of this volume of mist appears to the eye a succession of rainbows, floating slowly and gracefully down the valley, and reluctantly yielding their place to others by which they are continually followed. No contrast can be more perfect than that of these circles of light to the rude scenery by which they are environed; and no object of this nature which I have seen awakens such emotions of grandeur.

55

The differences in the wilderness experiences of Bartram, Mitchill and Dwight are unmistakable. Dwight's enthusiasm is as much the product of his "emotions" as it is of his eye -- a careful combination of what he felt and what he saw. In Scottish terms, Dwight's knowledge of Kaaterskill Falls resulted from the operation of mind on the data received by his senses, principally his eyes. While he estimates the height of the Falls and indicates how the water breaks over various sections, his desire for visual precision is overshadowed by a language of escape, terror and immensity which seems to diminish his rather tepid attempt at precision. Appealing to his reader by projecting an image of a "stupendous," "magnificent," and "immense" geomorphic feature, Dwight raises a question as to his purpose. Why describe such an image and why the

⁵⁵ Timothy Dwight, Travels in New-England and New-York. Reprinted in Rufas Griswold, Prose Writers of America (Philadelphia: A Hart, 1852), Reprinted by New York: Garrett Press, 1969, pp. 82-83.

difference between this description and the less elaborate ones of Bartram and Mitchill? To interpret this as serving only an aesthetic function begs the question, Might not it express a thematic function, or something else other than purely aesthetic pleasure? A simple aesthetic rationale seems simplistic and hollow in the hands of such a theological conservative as Timothy Dwight.

An adequate response to this issue demands more than just an analysis of the passage -- it is, intimately, bound up in the biography of Dwight as well as the cultural context in which he lived. Nevertheless, two elements of this passage must be highlighted. First, Dwight emphasizes the expanse of nature, here and everywhere, and the implied smallness of man. Dwight is impressed by the starkness of the Falls, its perpendicular cliffs, its "stupendous and awful grandeur," the bewildering and immense chasm that provides the channel for the stream. The image is one of great natural power, uncontrollable by man in an age when the power of man was believed to be boundless, an age when Governor DeWitt Clinton could write,

Great improvements must take place, which far surpass the momentum of power that a single nation can produce, but will, with facility, proceed from their united strength. The hand of art will change the face of the universe: mountains, deserts, and oceans will feel its mighty force. It will not then be debated whether hills should be prostrated, but whether the Alps and the Andes shall be levelled; nor whether sterile fields shall be fertilized, but whether the deserts of Africa shall feel the power of cultivation; nor whether rivers shall be

joined, but whether the Caspian Sea shall
 see the Mediterranean, and the waves of 56
 the Pacific love the Atlantic shores.

Over against Clinton's vision of things to come, in Dwight's description man is in a finite relation to nature. Yet the mood is also considerably different from Bartram's (and to a lesser extent Mitchill's) -- the emotional interplay between the observer's confused inner landscape and the overwhelming geological outer landscape controls the meaning of the scene. Dwight's language makes it difficult to distinguish between the geophysical scene and his image of the scene. If we can compare the two, then we can perhaps say something about the image-maker and his culture.

Second, Dwight makes a strong use of contrast. The water forms a "torrent perfectly glittering and white" but then disappears into the "midnight beneath"; the "dashing stream. . . winds beautifully away from the sight"; a "succession of rainbows, floating slowly and gracefully down the valley" contrasts with the "rude scenery." The soft, silky quality of a rainbow on the hard darkness of midnight reminds us of the painterly technique, commonly associated with three-dimensional art, used by those whose art took a linear form.

What were the origins of this remarkable piece of prose and its imagery? Timothy Dwight, not a scientist (though keenly interested in science, close friend of Benjamin Silliman and promoter of science at Yale College); not a natural historian (though he is reported to have

⁵⁶ Samuel Latham Mitchill, Discourse on the Character and Scientific Attainments of Dewitt Clinton, Late Governor of the State of New-York, Pronounced at the Lyceum of Natural History on July 14, 1828. (New York: E. Conrad, 1828), p. 7.

walked two thousand miles and travelled by horse for three thousand miles in exploring the northern United States), brings a considerably different background to his experience of the natural world than either Bartram or Mitchill. A staunch Calvinist theologian of establishment lineage, Dwight's vocation is in sharp contrast to the minimal formal religious training and institutional involvement of either Bartram or Mitchill. Furthermore, his college education focussed on the humanities. Mitchill's education was scientific and Bartram lacked formal training of any kind.⁵⁷ Thus, in considering the nature imagery of Timothy Dwight, another vanguard of Romantic and Common Sense images of the American wilderness, it is apparent that the changes occurring in the way Americans viewed their natural environment affected more than just those whose profession involved exploring the natural world.

The first significant evidence of Dwight's positive feeling for America's natural landscape is Greenfield Hill (1794), a long poem about the environment of his pastorate in Greenfield Hill, Connecticut. On the model of the topographical hill poem in vogue in England, of which the most famous example is John Dyer's Grongar Hill (1727), Greenfield Hill indicates Dwight's affection for the scenery of New-England, "his much-loved land" -- "the happiest realm. . . .the all-searching sun beholds." It

⁵⁷For bibliographical information on Dwight's academic and intellectual life, see Charles E. Cuninghame, Timothy Dwight 1752-1817 (New York: MacMillan, 1942). See also Leon Howard, The Connecticut Wits (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943).

included

fine descriptions of scenery -- discriminating touches of life and manners -- interesting historical associations -- ardent patriotism and pure and elevated moral sentiment. 58

A common sense acceptance of "things as they are" -- he was a local pastor at Greenfield Hill and not yet the President of Yale College -- characterizes the poem. Thus, Greenfield Hill raises the unavoidable problem of Dwight and Scottish Common Sense Realism. Leon Howard divides Dwight's career into two parts -- with 1795, the year Dwight assumed the Presidency of Yale, as the watershed year. In July, 1795, Dwight preached a Sermon to the Connecticut Society of the Cincinnati entitled The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness in which, according to Howard, Dwight eliminates "all anti-Lockean [Scottish] technical significance from the term Common Sense."⁵⁹ While this may be true for the Scottish "intuitive perception" as it relates to institutional concerns such as politics, economics and the church, it seems to me that the mood and language of Common Sense continues in Dwight's aesthetic meanderings. Howard, while admitting that "Common Sense was too good and too useful a term for Dwight to throw away," does not mention the distinctive

⁵⁸ Benjamin Silliman, A Sketch of the Life and Character of President Dwight. Delivered as an Eulogium in New-Haven on February 12, 1817. (New-Haven: Maltby, Goldsmith and Co., 1817), p. 14.

⁵⁹ Howard, op. cit., p. 234.

tone that the Scottish philosophy continued to give to Dwight's description of the natural world.

That Dwight was a follower of Lord Kames in his early days, much to the dismay of Naphtali Daggett, his mentor, has never been disputed.⁶⁰ Lord Kames' Elements of Criticism (1762), a book which served as Dwight's text at Yale in 1777, was also the model for the carefully wrought, yet pedantic style of Conquest of Canaan (1785). As Professor of Rhetoric, Dwight attempted to

orient his charges towards the intellectual vogue for Scottish Common Sense Criticism in this country. His pronouncements on Taste, Beauty, Language, Sublimity and Genius were strongly influenced by Hugh Blair's noted textbook Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (1783), a volume significant for its effect on early American aesthetics. 61

Despite adjustments in his theological stance,⁶² the aesthetics of his early years continued to influence Dwight's interpretation of the natural world. It was part of what Howard calls Dwight's "art of methodizing,"

⁶⁰ Naphtali Daggett (1727-1780) was Acting President of Yale (1766-1777) while Dwight was a college student as well as during his six years as tutor from 1771-1777.

⁶¹ Timothy Dwight, Remarks on the Review of Inchiquin's Letters, Published in the Quarterly Review: Addressed to the Right Honorable George Canning, Esq. (Originally published in Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1815), Reprinted with a forward by Abe C. Ravitz in New York: Garrett Press, Inc., 1970, p. vi.

⁶² For two contrasting studies on Dwight's theological development see H. Shelton Smith, Changing Conceptions of Original Sin: A Study in American Theology Since 1750 (New York: Scribners, 1955) and Sidney Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786-1858, a Connecticut Liberal (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942).

derived from Scottish Common Sense aesthetics and which was to become more highly developed in the prose of less skilled rhetoricists in the nineteenth century.

It is not at all clear where Dwight stood with respect to institutional aspects of Common Sense Philosophy after his six-year appointment as tutor at Yale College was completed. In his presidential sermons, he attempted to remove Scottish influence from his theological system by making the contrast between Locke and Paley the basis of his systematic intellectual ruminations.⁶³ He had redefined "Common Sense" to mean "a faculty. . . . which though never in high estimation among Philosophers, seems to have originated, and executed, almost all of the plans of human business which have proved to be of any use."⁶⁴ It was a popular, non-technical view. On the other hand, he falls back into using the language of the Scots which, though stripped of its metaphysical content, nevertheless tended to preserve an aesthetic mood. Dwight's indifference or perhaps nonchalance with respect to metaphysical completeness and coherence perhaps accounts for this situation.

A systematic statement of Dwight's point of view regarding natural beauty in Theology Explained and Defended

⁶³ Paley's The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy became particularly important to Dwight.

⁶⁴ Timothy Dwight, The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness, Preached in July 1795 before the Connecticut Society of the Cincinnati. Quoted in Howard, op. cit., p. 324.

is rather matter of fact and utilitarian. Dwight imagines a landscape of "dull, wearisome" dreariness devoid of "color and form," the sources of natural beauty. He then chastises his readers for taking the American landscape for granted and urges them to accept the external world "presented to the eye," as the primary source of aesthetic pleasure. Yet, these things "are so much things of course and exist so much without intermission, that we scarcely think either of their nature, their number, or the great proportion which they constitute in the whole mass of our enjoyment." Deprived of these luxuries, "we would sigh for the hills of our native land, the brooks and rivers, the living lustre of Spring, and the rich glories of Autumn."⁶⁵

Dwight's statement, despite its location in a systematic theology, has little metaphysical or epistemological content -- another interesting example of Dwight's apparent lack of interest in matters metaphysical. Dwight skirts the issue of what the mind does with the visual presentations of the eye. In this respect, he shows little intellectual imagination. Dwight's only explicit theological use of the natural world, a use which we have already observed in Bartram, was as evidence for the Creator's "goodness." He closes his discussion of beauty

⁶⁵ Timothy Dwight, Theology Explained and Defended. Sections reprinted in Griswold, Rufas W., Prose Writers in America, op. cit., p. 84.

by stating that

the ever-varying brilliancy and grandeur of the landscape, the magnificence of the sun, sky, moon, stars, enter more extensively into the enjoyment of mankind than we, perhaps, ever think, or can possibly apprehend, without frequent and extensive investigation. This beauty and splendour of the objects around us, it is ever to be remembered, are not necessary to their existence, nor to what we commonly intend by their usefulness. It is therefore, to be regarded as a source of pleasure gratuitously superintended upon the general nature of the objects themselves, and in this light, as a testimony of the divine goodness, particularly affecting. ⁶⁶

Dwight does not build a systematic aesthetic from his experience of the natural world, remaining satisfied with the popular, non-technical notions of beauty, and "taking what was good" from a variety of sources. But he was at least aware of the natural world -- much more than so many of his theological colleagues. The primary evidence for this beside Greenfield Hill is his four-volume Travels, in New-England and New-York, published posthumously in 1821-22. Dwight spent his vacations during his tenure as President of Yale "in travelling over the New-England States and the State of New York, in very many directions, for the purpose of giving an account of the country, in every important point, in which it would be interesting to the enlightened mind, and especially to posterity."⁶⁷ During these "rural pilgrimages," through the country he

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Silliman, op. cit., p. 31.

held so dear, Dwight preserved anecdotes of rural life, evidence of material progress, stories of historical or military interest, and images of the untamed scenery. Barbara M. Solomon has written, "Dwight was one of the earliest American writers to emphasize the aesthetic appeal of the places he described."⁶⁸ Dwight enjoyed the myriad details of the natural world, but not at the expense of the scenic view. The Falls of Niagara, Lake George, the Highlands of the Hudson, Kaaterskill Falls were closely observed, yet they also appeared as grand and scenic views, as if they had been photographed and preserved for posterity.⁶⁹

Two factors apparently spurred Dwight to make his summer trips -- an abiding and abundant curiosity about his environment "which was, in his opinion, under providence, the source of all its peculiar blessings, and to correct the misrepresentations of European travellers,

⁶⁸ Timothy Dwight, Travels in New-England and New-York, edited by Barbara M. Solomon (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, John Harvard Library, 1969), Preface to Volume I, p. xxvi.

⁶⁹ During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the years of Dwight's recorded visits to upstate New York, the "Claude Glass," a four-inch mirror with a slightly convex surface backed by black foil, enjoyed immense popularity in Britain. "Correct views," when seen through a "Claude Glass" appeared to be transformed into an oil painting of the most approved and correct sort. Correctness of the view was determined by the extent to which the view conformed with such polished landscape masters as the Virgilian Claude Lorraine after whom the "Claude glass" was named (1600-1682) or the romantic Salvator Rosa (1615-1673). On this, see further Christopher Hussey, The Picturesque, Studies in a Point of View (London: Cass, 1967).

which, he considered, as being with few exceptions, very gross."⁷⁰ The role of curiosity cannot be too highly emphasized. Except for naturalists and others with some professional interest in the natural world, very few of Dwight's contemporaries were willing to submit to the inconveniences of travel to rural and wilderness areas in the early part of the nineteenth century for pleasure and out of curiosity. Yet despite Dwight's desire to travel, an "intensification of a temperamental unwillingness to speculate affected every part of the Travels."⁷¹ Temperamental or not, Dwight's conservatism with respect to speculation and his increasing resistance to anything but the truth of "things as they are," did not hinder occasional imaginative descriptions of the natural scenery around him, though it should be noted that these were infrequent. Only in rare passages does Dwight break through the restrictive influence of the prevailing Scottish aesthetic into what the Scots would have considered romantic excess.

Dwight visited New York State at least four times, probably more. In 1802, he took his first trip to Lake George, repeating it in 1811. He visited Niagara Falls in 1804, travelling from New Haven to western New York via the Catskills, though it is not clear what he saw or did

⁷⁰ See further Timothy Dwight, Remarks., op. cit. These "remarks" were a vigorous defense of American life and institutions.

⁷¹ Howard, op. cit., p. 380.

there.⁷² A journey as far as Utica in 1815 also included the Catskills.

His report on Lake George is significant.⁷³ Dwight's 1802 visit was an exciting wilderness experience for him. After detailed information on the longitude, latitude, dimensions, depth, wind directions, weather, and similar topographical miscellany, Dwight finally concedes that

By persons who love fine scenes of nature, and probably by all who have visited this spot, I should be thought unpardonable were I to omit a particular description of those which are presented to the eye [for] Lake George is universally considered as being in itself and in its environs the most beautiful object of the same nature in the United States. 74

But why the popularity of Lake George? Using the opinions of European tourists as confirmation, Dwight briefly discusses its "access" thru "vast, bold. . . and in various places naked and hoary mountain ranges" before itemizing the scenic elements of the Lake itself.

The scenery of this spot may be advantageously considered under the following heads: the water, the islands, the shore, and the mountains. 75

Such a separation of the total environment into component

⁷²See footnote 54.

⁷³Charles Cuninghame (see reference footnote 58), Dwight's biographer reports only an incident with a hunter on the shores of Lake George which affected Dwight's sensibilities about war. See Cuninghame, pp. 83-84.

⁷⁴Dwight, Travels (Solomon edition), p. 247.

⁷⁵Ibid.

parts seems to rule out the kind of expansive "scenic view" cherished by romantics who sought a "correct" view on the model of Claude or Rosa. But this separation is only a preliminary tactic for Dwight. In each of these categories, he emphasizes the variety inherent within each and even allows his imaginative faculty to consider the unity of each category. For example, after some introductory geographical data, Dwight writes less factually about one component.

The summits of these mountains are of almost every figure, from the arch to the bold bluff and sharp cone; and this variety is almost everywhere visible. In some instances they are bald, solemn, and forbidding, in many others, tufted with lofty trees. While casting his eye over them, the traveller is fascinated with the immense variety of swells, undulations, slopes, and summits, pointed and arched, with their piny crowns; now near, verdant and vivid; then gradually receding, and becoming more obscure, until the scene closes in misty confusion. Nor is he less awed and gratified with the sudden promontory, the naked cliff, the stupendous precipice, the awful chasm, the sublime and barren eminence, and the vast heaps of rude and rocky grandeur which he sees thrown together in confusion and piled upon each other by the magnificent hand of nature. 76

After completing these short passages on the shape of the scenery, Dwight turns to the scene as a whole. In doing this, he does what every romantic traveller for the next fifty years would do -- he imagines three ideal locations for painting or sketching, making judgments about what is most romantic and sublime. Unfortunately, he

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 249.

fails to mention why he chose them.

I have noted the two major components of Dwight's most systematic statement of a theory of beauty -- color and form. From a concern for various shapes in the Lake George landscape, Dwight turns to a consideration of the total scene, and particularly to its coloration -- "the increasing variegations [sic] of light and shade which attend" the visitor. Because of the variety of shapes, "the gradual and sudden openings of scoops and basins, of islands and points, of promontories and summits. . . .a brilliancy, life, and motion scarcely inferior to that which is seen in the camera obscura" results. "Light and shade are here not only far more diversified, but are much more obvious, intense and glowing than in smooth, open countries." Dwight's eye "without forecast found itself, however disposed on ordinary occasions to inattention, instinctively engaged and fastened with emotions approximating to rapture."⁷⁷

Dwight concludes his discussion of the shape and color of Lake George with a paragraph of praise for a sunset, an occasion of heightened colors, shadows, and shapes. The combination, which "presented a superior prospect," released Dwight's emotions from their topographical prison.

The opening lay before us between the mountains on the west and those on the east, gilded by the departed sunbeams. The lake, alternately glassy and gently rippled, of

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 251.

a light and exquisite sapphire, gay and brilliant. . . .stretched in prospect to a vast distance, through a great variety of layer and smaller apertures. In the chasm formed by the mountains lay a multitude of islands, differing in size, shape and umbrages, and clothed in deeply shaded green. Beyond them and often partly hidden behind the tall and variously figured trees with which they were tufted, rose in the west and southwest a long range of distant mountains, tinged with deep misty azure, and crowned with an immense succession of lofty pines. . . .The tall trees on the western mountains lifted their heads in the crimson glory, and on this background displayed their diversified forms with a distinctness and beauty never surpassed. On a high and exactly semi-circular summit, the trees, ascending far without limbs, united their crowns above, and thus formed a majestic and extensive arch in the sky, dark, exactly defined, and exactly corresponding with the arch of the summit below. Between this crown and the mountain, the vivid orange light shining through the grove formed a third arch, equally extended and elegantly striped with black by the stems of the trees. 78

After what seems to be supreme contentment with the scene as it is, Dwight closes his letter from Lake George⁷⁹ with a typical paragraph of praise for the husbandman. Dwight knew the cost of life in the wilderness too well not to balance the idealized scenery with some recognition of the efforts at civilization by husbandmen who were committed to making a living off the land, and who were not just visiting it. Noticing that the

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 251-52.

⁷⁹Travels is written as a series of imaginary letters to an English correspondent -- a technique which allowed Dwight to correct what he thought were the unfortunate misinterpretations of American life and culture by foreigners, particularly the English.

"efforts at cultivation are obviously wanting," Dwight assures his reader that the industriousness of the American yeoman will soon

adorn these grounds with all the smiling scenes of agriculture. It does not demand the gift of prophecy to foresee that the villas of opulence and refinement, within a century, will add here all the elegances of art to the beauty and majesty of nature.⁸⁰

Dwight's visits to the Catskills in 1804 and 1815, while equally important, did not elicit the same amount of descriptive prose as his visits to Lake George. But there can be no doubt that the revered President of Yale had a great affection for the Catskill region, and especially for the area around what came to be known as Pine Orchard. If the movements of his family are any indication, certainly the Catskill Mountains played a significant role in Dwight's life. Benjamin Woolsey Dwight set up a hardware business in the town of Catskill, New York in 1817, the year of his father's death. Until 1831, when he moved his family to Clinton, New York, Dwight's son was part of the "Yankee invasion" of the Catskills. Grandson Henry E. Dwight contributed to the spread of information about the Catskills. In 1819, Henry polled friends (presumably educated and informed) in New England, and found that only one in ten had even heard of the Catskills. The region was still relatively remote to

⁸⁰Dwight, Travels, op. cit.

provincial New Englanders, even though it was increasingly accessible to them.⁸¹

It is clear from Timothy Dwight's description of Kaaterskill Falls⁸² that his vision was different from Mitchill's, just as Mitchill's was different from Bartram's. Neither Bartram nor Mitchill mentioned the approach to Kaaterskill Falls. But Dwight, in describing the wilderness setting of the Falls, identified an aspect of the wilderness central to the romantic vision of a later day. Paul Shepard, Jr. has called what Dwight describes a variety of "cross valley."⁸³ Although "cross-valleys" may be of various geological origin, they are all characterized by high, steep, cliff-like walls, usually with a river in the valley floor. The narrowness of the passage results in a fast current; the steep walls, craggy and seemingly impenetrable, raise the possibility of some cataclysmic origin. Furthermore, the walls are sufficiently steep to militate against agricultural use -- so that a wilderness seems preserved in these formations against the domestic encroachments of man. Most interesting, these geomorphic features of various origin all seem to elicit similar responses from man.

In the Catskills, "cross-valleys" were called

⁸¹ Henry E. Dwight, "Account of the Kaatskill Mountains," American Journal of Science Vol. II (1820), pp. 11-12.

⁸² See pages 94-96.

⁸³ Paul Shephard, Jr., "The Cross-Valley Syndrome," Landscape, Vol. X, #3.

cloves or kills. The forbidding and foreboding quality of the kill through which the Kaater ran is emphasized by Dwight. In describing the visual event which constitutes his first image of this feature, Dwight tries to paint faithfully and accurately the feature, but with a pervading mood of darkness and solitude. The passage is an interesting example of an attempt to record a spontaneous response to a landscape without compromising precision. Dwight sought to be honest to the sensations of his eye while composing and adjusting that image with a mind attuned to specific aesthetic sensibilities. Dwight even suggests that the river bed may be the road to Hell! The description is relatively straightforward.

Between two spurs of vast height sank a ravine, several miles in length, and in different places from a thousand to fifteen hundred feet in depth. The mountains on either side were steep, wild and shaggy, covered almost everywhere with a dark forest, the lofty trees of which approached nearer and nearer to each other as the eye wandered toward the bottom. In some places their branches became united; in others, separated by a small distance, they left a line of absolute darkness, resembling in its dimensions a winding rivulet, here somewhat wider, there narrower, and appearing as if it were a solitary bypath to the nether world. All beneath seemed to be a midnight although the day was uncommonly bright and beautiful; and all above a dreary solitude, secluded from the world, and destined never to be wandered over by the feet of man. 84

⁸⁴Griswold, op. cit., (Reprint of Dwight's Travels), pp. 82-3.

IV

What can we conclude about the experience of these three leading Americans? John Bartram, though he lacked formal education, was exposed to the developing Scottish aesthetic during his correspondence with British and continental horticulturalists and natural historians. The operation of reason, arranging and cataloguing his careful and detailed observations, did not lead to general scientific knowledge. But it did give hints of the sublime. Order and system became the ideals for Bartram, for through them, a cultivated person might develop an awareness of God's beneficent creation beyond simple uncultivated sentimentality.

Samual Mitchill, a naturalist with scientific tendencies, introduces an element of romanticism into the experience of the wilderness. Three of his aims -- "to import and domesticate in a republic European scientific knowledge; through American genius to achieve for the United States a place in the sun; and, to be guided by utility"⁸⁵ -- were basically nationalistic goals. A fourth, to demonstrate the wisdom and goodness of God as these were manifest in nature carried both the Common Sense penchant for detail, order and classification with the romantic vision of a unity beyond the sensate experience of nature.

⁸⁵Jones, op. cit., p. 344.

In Timothy Dwight, the two elements are combined -- the cultivated Common Sense concern for the detail of sense experience, even though filtered through the mind, is combined with a romantic enthusiasm for the Grand Scene. Dwight was dealing with the same problem that Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Cole had to deal with in their own separate ways: the seeming conflict between multifarious detail and miraculous unity. Emerson called it the "doubleness of everything." "The world is full of isolated details which should command our equal attention with emotional reverence, and yet ultimately it is all one vast simple truth: the world is both a mosaic and a unified picture which admits of no fragmentation."⁸⁶ Dwight combined the two, finding the miraculous in the common details.

With Timothy Dwight, the "reign of wonder," the reign of Romanticism informed by Scottish Realism has clearly made inroads into North America.⁸⁷ During the nineteenth century, fashionable tourists engaged in an orgy of enthusiasm for America's "natural wonders," stretching their Romantic eyes as far as their conservative Scottish controls would allow. Tourists travelled to the great wonders of upstate New York to absorb and verify

⁸⁶ Tony Tanner, The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

the dreams of their imaginations. Salvation lay with the wondering eye, which was best nourished by that unique element of the American landscape -- the wilderness.

Chapter 3:
Steaming Up the Hudson

The Romantic and Common Sense tendencies revealed in John Bartram's, Samuel Mitchill's and Timothy Dwight's descriptions of Pine Orchard and its environs became widespread in fashionable circles during the nineteenth century. The "Fashionable Tour" of New York's "natural wonders" grew in popularity as travellers sought the beautiful and the sublime. Having summarized the intellectual background in chapter 1 and analyzed three precursors of the Fashionable Tour in chapter 2, we now turn our attention to describing the tour itself. After some preliminary information and images of New York State as a whole, particularly with respect to transportation facilities on the Hudson River, we shall begin at New York City and, in this chapter, travel up the Hudson as far as the town of Catskill, New York. In the next chapter, we consider the importance of the Catskills in general and Pine Orchard in particular in early nineteenth century images of New York State. The second half of this study focusses on the wilderness images from Albany to Niagara Falls.

Pine Orchard, the Catskills and eventually the Hudson River Valley as a whole, combined with New York's already legendary Niagara Falls made New York State the tourist mecca of antebellum North America. It was a position lost later in the century with the opening of the west. The reasons for this prominence are not just aesthetic. Economic and geographical considerations are also important. After 1825, the lower Hudson River's

commercial importance as the link between upstate New York, the Great Lakes region and the eastern seaboard increased with the completion of the Erie Canal. The "noble Hudson. . . .reach[ed] out, as it were, to receive the tributary waters of the great northern and western lakes."¹ But it received more than water, for at Albany great quantities of raw materials from the rapidly developing "burned-over district" and the upper Midwest were traded for manufactured and imported goods necessary to the further development of these regions. At its southern end, it "commingled with the Atlantic Ocean after passing the Highlands, the Palisades, and the secure and spacious bay of New York," a bay which was the fastest growing commercial seaport in North America.²

The Hudson was easily accessible as well. A one-hundred mile radius from a point on the Hudson River half way between Albany and New York includes most of southwestern New England, New York State and northeastern Pennsylvania as far as Scranton. A two-hundred mile radius

¹ John Disturnell (compiler), A Gazetteer of the State of New York: Comprising its Topography, Geology, Mineralogical Resources, Civil Divisions, Canals, Railroads and Public Institutions; Together with General Statistics. . . . (Albany, New York: John Disturnell, 1842), p. iv.

² John Disturnell, The Traveller's Guide to the Hudson River, Saratoga Springs, Lake George, Falls of Niagara and Thousand Islands; Montreal, Quebec, and the Saguenay River; also, to the Green and White Mountains, and other parts of New England; Forming the Fashionable Northern Tour through the United States and Canada with Maps and Embellishments. (New York: The American News Company, 1864), p. 58.

includes Boston, eastern Maine, Philadelphia, Harrisburg and barely excludes Baltimore. This geographical proximity to the major urban areas of the new nation was crucial at a time when all types of transportation were both difficult and tedious and water transportation, when available, was usually preferred to the less comfortable overland alternatives. Geographically, the Hudson was the most centrally located stream of the day.

The Hudson River was not only uniquely situated commercially and geographically. It was also the spawning ground for the most important public transportation innovation in the United States prior to the railroad -- the steamboat. Fulton's Folly, built in 1807, was the first of sixty-two boats built for Hudson River commerce and tourism before the Civil War, weighing from 160 to 2300 tons.³ The speed of the boats was apparently most impressive to tourists. John Fowler, a British traveller, was clearly overwhelmed by his trip from New York to Albany in 1830 and even found it a sufficient excuse for his inability to describe the scenery along the route satisfactorily.

³Disturnell's Traveller's Guide (footnote 2 above) gives an interesting breakdown of steamboat construction for use on the Hudson River. What follows are the number of boats built in the indicated year. 1807 - 1; 1808 - 1; 1809 - 1; 1811 - 3; 1813 - 1; 1815 - 1; 1816 - 1; 1823 - 1; 1824 - 1; 1825 - 5; 1826 - 1; 1827 - 1; 1828 - 1; 1829 - 1; 1830 - 1; 1832 - 2; 1833 - 1; 1835 - 1; 1836 - 2; 1837 - 3; 1838 - 3; 1839 - 2; 1840 - 2; 1841 - 2; 1842 - 1; 1843 - 2; 1845 - 5; 1846 - 1; 1848 - 2; 1850 - 4; 1851 - 3; 1859 - 1; 1864 - 2.

In so rapid a transit [S. S. Albany] it is impossible that I should describe places, or do any justice to the impressions excited by the varied and all-attractive scenery of this noble river. I could have wished not to have 'thought down hours to moments' but to have prolonged moments to hours. I was so hurried on from the sublime to the beautiful, and again from the beautiful to the sublime, that before the image of one had impressed itself upon my mind, the other appeared to take possession, and every successive change but deepened the thrill of admiration and rapture. 4

Samuel DeVeaux, whose various services to upstate New York included merchandizing and government work, also wrote an American guidebook in widespread use in 1841 in which he complained that the steamboats "abolished time and space,"⁵ implying with Fowler, that the experience of the Hudson's glories could not be hurried and remain vivid beyond the most general, even if lasting impression. Both Fowler and DeVeaux suggest that to tarry along the Hudson was necessary to absorb in adequate detail the "beauties of nature" and the "wonders of man."⁶

Yet the desire for "rapid transit" remained.

Because they combined speed with a hitherto unknown luxury

⁴John Fowler, Journal of a Tour in the State of New York in the Year 1830: With Remarks on Agriculture in the Parts Most Eligible for Settlers (London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Arnot, 1831), p. 38.

⁵Samuel DeVeaux, The Traveller's Own Book to Saratoga Springs, Niagara Falls and Canada Containing Routes, Distances, Conveyances, Expenses, Use of Mineral Waters, Baths, Description of Scenery, etc. A Complete Guide for the Valetudinarian and for the Tourist, Seeking for Pleasure and Amusement. . . . (Buffalo; Faxon and Read, 1841): p. 22.

⁶Ibid., p. 19.

in travel, the steamboats themselves became one of the attractions of upstate New York. A trip on the S. S. Albany provided a degree of comfort and gentility treasured by those who were previously forced to travel over almost non-existent roads and pikes. The romantic aura continued even after the introduction of the speedier train. In 1855, J. Richard Beste reported that trains and steamboats were in a dead heat for the tourist business during the summer months.

Pass we the village of Catskill, with its distant hills and waterfalls; the train upon the railroad that runs parallel with the river, is passing them all even quicker than we. Strange that a railway can be maintained in opposition to such a splendid carriage! But, during all the winter, the water carriage is docked up by ice; and then the railway reaps its double harvest. Strange rather, that such floating palaces can be maintained for the summer months only, against a railway that can work year round! . . . but the steamers are, evidently, preferred by all who can convert the transaction of business into a pleasure excursion, through some of the most magnificent scenery ⁷ in the world.

A balanced use of the railways by winter and business travellers and the steamboat by summer and pleasure travellers did not last long. By 1859, Richard Cobden, an Englishman, observed that

very few passengers travel by water by day as they prefer the railway. The night boats are ⁸ however filled sometimes carrying 600 persons.

⁷J. Richard Best, The Wabash: or, Adventures of an English Gentlemen's Family in the Interior of America (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1855), Vol. I, pp. 99-100.

⁸Richard Cobden, The American Diaries of Richard Cobden, edited with an introduction and notes by Elizabeth Hoon

In 1841, DeVeaux had "recommended a day passage [by steamboat] . . . to those who have never been up the Hudson" lest the traveller be accused of "unpardonable apathy" to the Romantic Hudson River Valley.⁹ Yet within twenty years, the superior facilities and tourist opportunities provided by the Hudson River's "floating palaces" could not compete with the speedier trains. Steam-powered water transport lost out to steam-powered land transport. The novelty had worn thin and only night passengers kept the boats running. By the Civil War, travellers preferred the romance of "moments" to the romance of "hours," even though before the Civil War, the luxury of steamboat travel was almost a holiday in itself, which, when combined with the external wonders of the Hudson River scenery, made a trip on the Hudson the most celebrated package tour in antebellum America. The era of discovery and popularization of New York State's fresh and exciting natural wonders was precisely the era of the steamboat.

Unlike today, New York tourism was also stimulated by a tendency for American tourists to travel from south to north. Because of the difficulties of travel, Americans made fewer long distance trips and tried to combine business and pleasure whenever possible. Since the commercial,

Cawley. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 169. This quotation is taken from the 1859 diary, the second of two. The first diary was written in 1835.

⁹ DeVeaux, op. cit.

industrial and cultural centers of the nation were in the Northeast, New York and New England became tourist magnets and romantic scenery only heightened their attractiveness. Either climate was less a factor in vacation planning then than now, or else the numerous advantages of the northern states offset the self-indulgent temptations of a sunny insect-ridden south. Southerners travelled north to engage their minds in business and cultural pursuits not available in the more rural and agricultural south. Northerners stayed closer to home or went to Europe for their holidays. For all Americans, winter holidays were unusual. While the desire for relief from the cold northern climes was not unknown, it was hardly sufficient reason for a New Yorker or a New Englander to bracket family and business obligations and travel south. Rather, rare winter vacations often developed into extended family and/or business junkets to Southern Europe, often Italy.

The north, particularly New York State, received a disproportionate amount of the rising benefits of an increasingly complex commercial system -- trade and capital flowed into its coffers and tourists floated along its waterways. It is hardly surprising therefore that the "atmosphere in which American Romanticism developed was the scenic mountains of New York,"¹⁰ which, during the antebellum period, meant the mountains visible from the

¹⁰ Edgar Mayhew Bacon, The Hudson River: From Ocean to Source (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), p. 42.

Hudson River. The highest known at the time were those in the "high peaks" area surrounding John Bartram's balsam fir orchard, the same area where Samuel Mitchill observed a waterfall "exceedingly picturesque, which under the pencil of an artist, would afford a sketch possessing much novelty and peculiarity"¹¹ and Timothy Dwight looked down a "solitary by-path to the nether world."¹²

During this period, the Adirondack mountains, today known to be the highest and principal mountain range of New York State were described as "generally hilly" by F. S. Eastman, an American amateur historian who published a short History of New York in 1828 "designed for the use of schools and families." Eastman writes that New York State was

less mountainous than many parts of America. The Catskill Mountains in the eastern part of the state are the principal range. The Western part generally presents a level, or moderately undulating surface. . . . The northeastern part of the state is generally hilly; and the height of the land between Champlain and the St. Lawrence presents a range of considerable elevation. 13

One year later, James Macauley, in his 1829 three-volume Natural, Statistical and Civil History of the State of New York was even bolder in his topographical guesswork. Not

¹¹See chapter 2.

¹²See chapter 2.

¹³F. S. Eastman, A History of the State of New York from the First Discovery of the Country to the Present Time (New York: E. Bliss, 1828), pp. 3-4.

only were the Catskills the "principal range," they were also the "loftiest in the State!"¹⁴ Despite this judgment, Macauley recognized the possibility of error and lamented a dearth of information about the so-called "Sacondaga Tract."

That mountain region in the north. . . . commences in the Province of Lower Canada, a little north of latitude forty-five, and extends southwardly to the Mohawk RiverWe shall endeavor to describe its interiors; but from the uncultivated state of the country, we shall not be able to arrive at results as accurate as we would desire. 15

Even fifty years later in 1877, Nathaniel Sylvester (1825-1894) published a series of thirty-three sketches in the Troy Times (later published under the title Historical Sketches of Northern New York and the Adirondack Wilderness) which described the untracked region as

spread [like] a primeval forest, covering the land as the grass covers a garden lawn, sweeping over hill and hollow in endless undulation, burying mountains in verdure, and mantling brooks and rivers from the light of day. . . .Of a truth, it may be said to be a vast wilderness of almost interminable sweep, surrounded by a narrow fringe of settlements. . . .and by the world's greatest routes of travel. 16

¹⁴James Macauley, The Natural, Statistical and Civil History of the State of New-York (New York: Gould and Banks, 1829), Vol. I, p. 12.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 2-3.

¹⁶Nathaniel Bartlett Sylvester, Historical Sketches of Northern New York and the Adirondack Wilderness (Troy, New York: W. H. Young, 1877), pp. 9-10, 41. The Adirondack Mountains north of the Erie Canal were almost unknown before the Civil War except to a few inarticulate trappers

South of the Erie Canal, the "Southern Tier" was barely more than a sparsely inhabited frontier region, though it was being rapidly settled. The countryside was stark -- the frontier in New York State and elsewhere was not some imaginary line dividing western civilization from savagery, but rather a fluctuating and volatile zone in which the bare rudiments of European culture and the flickering spirit of a native American culture co-existed. Captain Basil Hall, controversial English critic of the New World, was an acute observer of this New York frontier situation in 1827-28. On seeing a humble "wood-factory," he remarked that

An Englishman might fancy himself in the vale of the Stroud. But mark the difference: -- at the next crack of the whip -- hocus-pocus! -- all is changed. He looks out of the window, rubs his eyes, and discovers that he is again in the depth of wood. . . .with the world just beginning to breed, in the shape of a smoaky log-hut, ten feet by twelve, filled 17 with dusty faced children.

Another travelling European, Lavasseur, General Lafayette's Secretary, romanticized his observations of 1824-25 while supporting the contrast between civilization and wilderness noticed by Hall.

and hunters. Only scientists, whose interests tended to be more topographical and geological than romantic, and occasional New York journalists, who slowly introduced scattered events and places to the New York newspaper-reading public penetrated the Adirondacks.

¹⁷Basil Hall, Travels in North America, in the years 1827 and 1828, in three volumes (Philadelphia: 1829 and Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1830), Vol. I, p. 75.

In streets traced through the forest, and yet unencumbered with trunks of trees and scattered branches, luxury already appears in the light wagons drawn by splendid horses.¹⁸

Development was rapid but the land was vast.

Uncritical enthusiasm for DeWitt Clinton's dreams of New York's destiny and glory must not overshadow this latter fact. William W. Campbell (1806-1881), who wielded significant political influence as a jurist and a Congressman, claimed in 1849 that "the most casual observer [could] not fail to notice the mighty changes which the forty succeeding years [1809-1849] have produced" though he admitted that it might strain the imagination to envision the "western wilderness. . . .budded and blossomed."¹⁹

Even geographical and topographical information was meagre, particularly for the huge land areas of northern and western New York State. Similarly, though more was known of the Catskill range than of what were later called the Adirondack mountains, much of the southeastern section of the state was known only as an immense and uncultivated section of forest. All three regions, which Disturnell's Gazetteer of the State of New York (1842) identified as the "Southern Division, Northern Division and Eastern Division" respectively, were still wilderness areas. Despite his fanciful adjustment of the points of

¹⁸A. Lavasseur, Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825, translated by John D. Godman, M.D. (Philadelphia: 1829), p. 189.

¹⁹William W. Campbell, The Life and Writings of DeWitt Clinton (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849), p. 26.

the compass, Disturnell admits to the lack of geographical knowledge by not engaging in topographical guesswork, by limiting his comments to the lower elevations and by complaining that at least the mountainous areas

have not, as yet, received the attention which they deserve, and we cannot speak confidently on this in interesting subjectIt is a field rich in phenomena of the most interesting kind, and in which few have labored in this country. ²⁰

"Uncultivated" -- perhaps Macauley's word embodies better than any other the dominant image of New York State as a whole during the ante-bellum period. On the one hand, it accurately characterizes the wilderness condition apparent to anyone who travelled in the State. Yet the recognition of incompleteness implied by the use of a negative betrays a fervent desire to civilize the landscape by converting it from an "uncultivated" to a cultivated state. Settlement was proceeding with vigor in anticipation of a cultivated landscape. Yet Macauley estimated that in 1829, only one-fourth of the state's land area was "improved." Cities, farms, rural estates, hunting reserves and other lands which felt the direct or indirect influence of man constituted only one-quarter of the state. These were concentrated along the major waterways, the Hudson River from New York to Albany and the Erie Canal from Albany to Buffalo. (Before 1825, the Mohawk River served

²⁰Disturnell Gazetteer (1842), op. cit., pp. 5-8.

less adequately as the waterway to the west.) Three-quarters of the State remained a wilderness.

The discovery of the Romantic Hudson was a gradual process. The experiences of Bartram, Mitchill and Dwight were only the first fruits of a new, yet undeveloped awareness. They guarded their enthusiasm by keeping it within their sheltered personal and professional circles. As a publicist for America's historical and natural wonders, Washington Irving (1783-1859), more than these travellers, is responsible for introducing the Hudson River Valley's romantic features to the general public. As a boy, Irving explored the river with his friend James Kirke Paulding (1778-1860) with whom he later collaborated in literary ventures. In his various excursions along the Hudson, Irving

found a stream that was wonderful in beauty
and already rich in material for history,
but the beauty was uncelebrated and the
history unrecorded. 21

It was to the exploration of that beauty and history that Irving devoted much of his professional life. A life-long affection for nature, a temperamental bias for the sprawling burlesque, a pedantic pursuit of faded antiquities, and a knack for story-telling all conspired to create such figures as Rip Van Winkle who haunted the dells of the Hudson River Valley as well as the minds of Irving's readers. Irving also haunted his valley -- "come and see me," he wrote, "and I will give you a book and a tree."

²¹Bacon, op. cit., p. 246.

Although Irving's choice of the Hudson Valley as a setting for his fanciful tales of assorted old men and devilish creatures helped instill the Hudson's Romantic possibilities in the minds of Americans, the later non-literary travelling public, American and foreign, were much less obscure in their reactions to the Hudson River. Their diaries and journals reflect an immediacy of experience filtered through their aesthetic sensibilities to be sure, but without the abundant imaginative flights of fancy typical of Irving. Irving seemed to defy the Scottish distaste for the imagination by publishing stories with identifiable geographical settings, and large doses of romantic "excess." He questioned whether simple physical description, embroidered only by historical associations and not by the imagination, could do justice to the romantic wonders of the Hudson Valley. It was the same issue frequently raised by fashionable tourists later in the century -- whether or not topographical description, with ornamentation limited and defined by the conserving aesthetics of Common Sense Realism, could adequately project their romantic image. Most said no, but they tacitly accepted those limitations by pursuing a course of description which did not break out of the Common Sense mold. Hence, a statement of the inadequacies of descriptive prose prefaced almost every attempt to do what tourists insisted could not be done.

A variation of this theme appears in the travel narratives of Frances Wright (1795-1852), a reforming and free-thinking Scotswoman best known as the collaborator

of Robert Dale Owen. In 1818-1820, her first years in the United States, Wright joined other visitors in travelling up the Hudson River. But unlike other travellers, she suggested that readers of her diary would

not care to trace. . . .the beautiful course of this river. The features of nature, so unspeakably lovely to contemplate, are often tiresome of description. A few observations of the military academy at West Point will perhaps interest you more than a sketch of the rocks and woody precipices upon which it stands.²²

Frances Wright implicitly rejected the Scottish aesthetic in suggesting that description was "often tiresome." Rather, she responded to the "features of nature" through contemplation. It was as atypical a response as that of Washington Irving for whom the "features of nature" ignited a fertile imagination. More common was precisely a "sketch" or a "tracing" of the Hudson River scenery.

Despite an attempt to imply the contrary, the "sketch" or "tracing" was a straightforward exercise for most travellers, so much so that they became predictable. Models had been established and tourists followed them. First impressions were invariably accompanied by surprise. Combined with the prevailing confusion over whether "realistic" description could do justice to romantic feelings, this initial surprise further encouraged a prescribed reluctance to express developing romantic feelings in print.

²² Frances Wright Darusmont, Views of Society and Manners in America, by an Englishwoman (London: 1822), p. 149. Fanny Wright's works are usually catalogued under "D'Arusmont", the name she assumed in 1831 on marrying a man by that name.

Mrs. Felton, an Englishwoman who, like Basil Hall, had little good to say about the United States, admitted that before she "had been in America, [she] had heard, with perfect indifference, the scenery of the Hudson whispered in faint accents of praise." Expecting to see "nothing more than a fine river winding its way through a forest," she was "totally unprepared for the pleasure" of visiting the Hudson and felt "totally inadequate to impart an idea of the beauties" of her voyage. Typically she suggested that "to be fully appreciated, they must be seen."²³ Felton was also surprised by the "wilderness of nature [which] seems to usurp uninterrupted sway; when, suddenly, the river widens into what appears an expansive lake." For one who had believed "that nothing could exceed the beauties of the Isle of Wight, and some scenes on the lakes of Scotland," the sheer majesty of an "uninterrupted" wilderness and an "expansive" lake and the gracefulness with which "nature had studied to disperse woods, rocks, mountains, streams and lakes. . . .under such circumstances as will best display sublimity and beauty" forced her beloved British wonders to "yield the palm to the scenery of the Hudson."²⁴

Frances Trollope (1780-1863), English friend of

²³ Mrs. Felton, Life in America -- A Narrative of Two Years City and Country Residence in the United States (Hull: Printed by John Hutchison, Scale-Lane and Sold by Simplim and Marshall, London; 1838), p. 88.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 88-89.

Frances Wright, whose Domestic Manners of the Americans was one of many remarkable, if controversial, literary forays, expressed a similar surprise and reluctance to sketch or "paint" the Hudson River scenery.

I had heard so much of the surpassing beauty of the North River, that I expected to be disappointed, and to find reality flat after description. But it is not in the power of man to paint with a strength exceeding that of nature, in such scenes as the Hudson presents. Every mile shows some new and startling effect of the combination of rocks, trees and water; there is no interval of flat or insipid scenery, for the moment you enter upon the river at New York, to that of quitting²⁵ at Albany.

American Timothy Bigelow (1767-1821), a member of the Massachusetts State House and Senate and Speaker of the State House for eleven years, was also surprised that the Hudson was "more respectable in magnitude than we had imagined." Yet more compelling than the river's "majesty," "gracefulness" or "surpassing beauty" was the unanticipated contrast between the wilderness condition and the suggestions of civilization.

It is amusing in travelling thus into the interior country, where one seems to be embosomed in the woods, to come forth at once into a view of the noble stream, and to see the swelling canvas of commerce gliding²⁶ among the forest trees.

²⁵ Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans, Second Edition (London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Company, 1832), Vol. II, pp. 202-3.

²⁶ Timothy Bigelow, Journal of a Tour to Niagara Falls in the Year 1805 (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1876), p. 8.

Irishmen were also overwhelmed. Tyrone Power (1797-1841), whose first American tour in 1833-1835 was a rousing theatrical success, wrote perhaps the most laudatory description of the Hudson at first impression.

What man endowed with an ordinary share of devotion to Nature, and admiration of her handiwork, dare venture to set down his impressions of this enchanting Hudson, whilst the overwhelming influence it creates²⁷ is yet dazzling his imagination.

While he too complained that the speed of the steamer meant that the sights were "pointed out, glanced at, and rapidly left behind," nevertheless Power was

absorbed, filled, bewildered, in the admiration which each rapidly-opening point outlined, for never before this fair morning had such a succession of matchless river views passed before his delighted eyes.

Power reacted strangely for one accustomed to public performance and so often in the public view. He avoided the "intelligent friends" who accompanied him on his Hudson River trip for fear that he would be "shamed" by his weakness when he faced them with a "melting mood." Yet he excused his reluctance to be seen in a state of reduced self-control.

In no mood could an enthusiast of Nature, I think, feel otherwise than 'rapt' when free for the first time to view, on such a day, such glorious magic pass before his sight; for, in our rapid flight, I could compare²⁸ the effect of all I saw to glamor only.

²⁷Tyrone Power, Impressions of America (Philadelphia: 1836 and London: R. Bentley, 1836), Vol. I, p. 342-3.

One is inclined to attribute Power's first impression of the Hudson to his dramatic and sentimental career on the stage. Yet with many other seekers of "romantic scenery," he also appeared to have an "enthusiastic" desire to see more in Nature than simply form and color.

Wallace Bruce (b. 1844), Lyceum lecturer on literary subjects and author/compiler of several books on travel, reports that the Hudson River was usually divided into five scenic "divisions, or reaches. . . .divisions marked by something more substantial than sentiment or fancy, expressing five distinct characteristics."²⁹ As we travel up the Hudson River, these "divisions, reaches," or types of landscape will become obvious. Briefly however, from south to north, these geographical sections were commonly understood to be the Palisades, Tappan Sea (or Zee), the Highlands, the Hillsides and the Catskills. In attributing to each section a "distinct characteristic," Bruce was on more controversial ground. Grandeur, repose, sublimity, picturesqueness and beauty, which Bruce respectively attached to the five divisions, were employed quite loosely by most travellers. Needless to say, there is considerable overlapping; these descriptions are merely suggestive. They do, however, indicate the variety of

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Wallace Bruce, The Hudson by Daylight (New York: John Featherstone, 1873), p. 22. Featherstone was proprietor of newstands on the Day Line, which ran steamboats between Albany and New York.

scenery along the Hudson.

The steamboat glided north from New York, past "numerous little towns and villages -- suburbs of New York and places of holiday resort for its citizens."³⁰ Before arriving at the first scenic "division," the Palisades on the west bank of the river, the scenery was almost universally judged to be "bright, but not striking." For the first few miles, tourists seemed more impressed by "country seats and snug farm houses" than the "green hills and pastures in which they were nestled."³¹ James Fenimore Cooper saw the scene as a source of national pride.

In few villages are seen, white, neat, and thriving, and of a youthful, vigorous air, as it is generally the case with an American village, while there is scarcely an eligible site for a dwelling that is not occupied by a villa, or one of the convenient and respectable farm houses of the country. Orchards, cattle, fields of grain, and all the other signs of a high domestic condition, serve to heighten the contrast of the
32
opposing banks.

In highlighting the "contrast of the opposing banks," Cooper introduced a dimension of Hudson River scenery which became more apparent further north. The dichotomy between the east bank's "most beautiful country

³⁰Beste, op. cit., p. 96.

³¹John M. Duncan, Travels Through Part of the United States and Canada in 1818 and 1819 (Glasgow: Printed at the University Press for Hurst, Robinson and Company, London, 1823), Vol. I, pp. 313-4.

³²James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of the Americans: Picked Up by a Travelling Bachelor (London: Henry Colburn of New Burlington Street, 1828), Vol. I, pp. 272-3.

of undulating scenery"³³ and the west bank's "forests as yet untamed afforded the traveller a glimpse of what America formerly was, when none but the Indian traversed its shores, and only the bark canoe glided over its waters,"³⁴ became more pronounced when the steamboat reached the Palisades.³⁵ Most travellers marvelled at the progress made in taming the wilderness, but also conjured up images of what it must have been like before their arrival. The Palisades were "dark and frowning" voices out of the past, a "gigantic stockade"³⁶ reminding them of what they imagined to be a more military, less pastoral past. Clearly, the contrast was not just man-made. In spite of the fact that

the hand of man has cut from the forests,
farms which are the patterns of loveliness
. . . .where the earth smiles beneath the
dressings of the husbandman and blossoms
in all the variety of a rich and splendid
loveliness, -- it would seem that nature
had intended to make a contrast here, and
whenever she effects a design of hers, no
matter of what kind, it is sure to be **37**
perfect.

The works of nature were hardly ignored in the face of man-created loveliness. McKenney, an American traveller,

³³Thomas Loraine McKenney, Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes (Baltimore: 1827), p. 32.

³⁴Duncan, op. cit., pp. 313-4.

³⁵Sometimes spelled Palissades or Palisadoes.

³⁶Power, op. cit., p. 342.

³⁷McKenney, op. cit., p. 32.

almost seems to speak personally in observing that Nature was "perfect" in the "effect [ing]" of her "design."

The "impossible boundary"³⁸ (the Palisades) extends about twenty miles as far as the "broad, glorious, Tappan Sea,"³⁹ at which point it "becomes a rich and finely cultivated country, gently rising from the river for some distance, and then terminating in the high hills."⁴⁰ The inter-mixture of farm houses, elegant country seats, fine forests and cultivated fields again impressed travellers, but more striking was the "huge basin of lake-like width."⁴¹ It was the picture of beauty for Fanny Kemble -- "triumphant sunlight" reflected off a "restless mirror, . . . the golden flags flinging themselves up every tiny crevice." Usually a model of pastoral "repose" according to Bruce's typology, its vastness carried a quiet strength for Kemble who saw its explosive potential as both "bright and beautiful."

Pursuing our journey north,

We enter upon a scene, which has long been celebrated as one of unrivalled beauty, and magnificence -- the passage of the Hudson through the Highlands, or Fishkill Mountains.⁴²

³⁸ Beste, op. cit., p. 96.

³⁹ Frances Anne ("Fanny") Kemble, Journal, 1832-1834 (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1835), Vol. I, pp. 262-3.

⁴⁰ Henry Dilworth Gilpin, A Northern Tour: Being a Guide to Saratoga Springs, Lake George, Niagara, Canada. . . . Embracing An Account of the Canals, Colleges, Public Institutions, Natural Curiosities, etc. (Philadelphia: H. D. Carey and I. Lea, 1825), p. 22.

⁴¹ Kemble, op. cit., pp. 262-3.

Travellers had already passed two remarkable geological features of the Hudson River Valley, the Palisades and the Tappan Sea, but they were only a hint of things to come. On approaching the Highlands, many were convinced that they were entering "the most romantic spot in America." William Darby again complained that the steamboats "deprived passengers of. . . one of the finest views in North America. . . seen by very few of those who traverse through its sublime portals, and who travel expressly for the purpose of beholding nature in her most attractive garb."⁴³

At the entrance to the Highlands "are a succession of confused and beautifully romantic mountains, with broken and irregular summits, which nature had apparently once opposed to the passage of the water," Cooper continues, apparently satisfied with his view of the Highlands. His only complaint is that the area immediately south of the entrance is "peculiar" because

the proportions of objects are not sufficiently preserved to give to the land, or to the water, the effect which they are capable of producing in conjunction. . . . Within the Highlands, the objection is lost. The river is reduced to less than half its former width, (at least it appears so to the eye), while the mountains rise to three

⁴²Gilpin, op. cit., p. 33.

⁴³William Darby, A Tour from the City of New York, to Detroit (Chicago: American Classics Series, Quadrangle Books, 1962), p. 10. This volume was originally published in 1819, describing a tour of May 2, 1818 to September 22, 1818.

and four times the altitude of the parapets. Rocks, broken, ragged, and fantastic; forests, through which disjointed precipices are seen forming dusky backgrounds; promontories; dark, deep bays; low sylvan points; elevated plains; gloomy, retiring vallies; pinnacles; cones, ramparts, that overhang and frown upon the water; and, in short, almost every variety of form which the imagination can conjure pictures of 44 romantic beauty, are assembled here.

Just beyond the entrance to the Highlands was the setting of Joseph Rodman Drake's "The Culprit Fay." Written in August, 1816, in response to a remark that American rivers were not furnished with adequate legendary lore to be subjects for poetry (a notion that Irving also tried to demolish), "The Culprit Fay" was a fanciful reverie set in Crow's Nest near Storm King Mountain on the west bank of the Hudson. Nelson's Illustrated Guide called Drake's effort a

most admirable and highly imaginative poem -- the first fruits of fancy in this sternly practical country. . . . which describes the peculiarities of American 45 nature with great knowledge.

Nelson's description is itself peculiar, for there is no evidence that Drake spent any time in Crow's Nest, and certainly there is only veiled reference to a specific geographical locale in the poem. But it was loved by nineteenth century society. Drake accomplished two things. First, with Washington Irving, Drake proved that if the

⁴⁴ Cooper, op. cit., pp. 273-4.

⁴⁵ _____, Nelson's Illustrated Guide to the Hudson and Its Tributaries (New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1860), p. 86.

the Hudson River Valley did not have a wealth of legendary lore, it could be easily created and that Americans were quite receptive to such lore. Second, Drake made tourist attractions of Crow's Nest and its surrounding peaks, Storm King and Beacon Hill.

The compiler of Nelson's Guide was particularly enamored of the area around Storm King. He predicted boldly that a

lovely little village named Tempe, and almost deserving of the classic name, so charming is its sylvan scenery, enlivened by many a bubbling brook, . . . is destined to become one day the object of many a pilgrimage by Nature-worshipping Hadjis. 46

As it turned out, the Hadjis sought out sites and sights further north and west. They were more interested in the sublime grandeur of large natural wonders such as the view from Pine Orchard and the cataract of Niagara Falls than the "babbling brooks" of merely "beautiful and interesting regions." Nelson also recommended a climb up Beacon Hill, slightly higher than Storm King, a summit which "affords a view of the landscape at once one of the grandest and most beautiful that can be found in the Union."⁴⁷ Yet what is so revealing about Nelson's description is the way he constructs a "frame or setting" for his vision, almost as if he had an easel and were attempting to paint what he saw. A verbal image had to suffice, but in the style of the

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁷Ibid.

"pictorial mode."

The spectator, gazing from its height upon the scene before him to the west and north, is placed as it were upon the boundary. . . . the Highlands in the south, the hills of the Shawangunk range in the west, and the Catskills in the north quite round the picture. . . . in this fine setting the materials of the beautiful and the picturesque are arranged with all the grandeur, the softness, and beauty of detail, that the most fastidious connoisseur of fine scenery can desire. Before you lies the Hudson, swollen into a lovely expanse or bay of ten miles in length--afterwards narrowing and meandering away to the south, until it is lost to the eye in the distance--sprinkled through its whole course with the white sails of the numberless vessels that float upon its surface. . . . The soft green of the meadows--the deeper tints of the forest masses, scattered here and there through the cultivated lands--the golden hue of the grain fields in mid-summer--and the sparkling lustre of the river, and the two small lakes west of Newburgh, which shine like sheets of silver in the rays of the declining sun,--all these, with a thousand variations in the grouping of the details, produced by the art of man in a tract of country which yields a luxuriance of vegetation to correspond with its noble river and fine hills, form a picture such as we may suppose greeted the eyes of Moses when he looked down upon the Promised Land. 48

The boat made a scheduled stop at West Point, a "village of academic buildings, barracks and other adjuncts." Many descriptions concentrate on views from that site. At the "Point" the Highlands "attract [ed] notice not only from their grandeur and sublimity, but also important events of the revolution." As Cooper put it, to the

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 88-9.

natural qualities of the scenery, must be associated more artificial accessories than are common to America. The ruins of military works are scattered profusely among these wild and rugged hills, and more than one tale of blood and of daring is recommended to the traveller as he glides along their somber shadows. 49

The "Point" brought together two continuing and complementary themes in descriptions of the fashionable tour. (1) Important Revolutionary sites assumed, through their association with the principles for which Americans presumably fought, a moral sublimity in addition to their aesthetic value. (2) Romantic river scenery served as a source of national pride. Both reinforced each other -- the grandeur and majesty of the physical landscape lent an aura of grandeur to historical sites; the associations dredged up on behalf of the historical landmarks gave a human dimension to the romantic scenery.

As the center of numerous "artificial accessories" which characterized the Highlands, West Point was at the center of the simmering debate as to whether historical associations were an important or even necessary part of sublime and/or picturesque scenery. Here, after all, was the site of the military academy. The ghosts of Washington and Kosciusko lingered on in the battlements and monuments to these generals. British travellers, accustomed to the association of scenery with historical events, tended to look critically on the lack of ruins in America. Americans

⁴⁹Cooper, op. cit., p. 274.

reacted in two basic ways. On the one hand, some attempted to deny any lack of ruins in the United States. Yet there was something unconvincing in this thrust at self-justification on European terms by persons who themselves had travelled widely in Europe. Bayard Taylor (1825-1878), the Marco Polo of North American travel, whose letters, poems and travelogues from the far corners of the earth enchanted Americans bored with their secure, stable domestic lives, guided some European guests up the Hudson one summer. His account of this issue is instructive.

It is customary among our tourists to deplore the absence of ruins on those heights [Highlands] -- a very unnecessary regret, in my opinion. To show that we have associations as fully as inspiring as those connected with feudal warfare, I related the story of Stony Point and Andre's capture; and pointed out, successively, Kosciusko's Monument, Old Fort Putnam, and Washington's Headquarters. 50

A more nationalistic, less European, sentiment is characterized by the poetry of Robert C. Sands (1799-1832), intimate of the Knickerbocker group in New York City, sometime journalist and literary eclectic. Sands wondered whether or not those who demand historical associations were truly "nature lovers." After two stanzas describing the glories of a sunset, Sands continues,

River and Mountain! though to song
Not Yet, perchance, your names belong;
Those who have loved your evening hues,
Will ask not the recording Muse
What antique tales she can relate,
Your banks and steeps to consecrate.

⁵⁰ Bayard Taylor, Travels-At Home, Reprinted in Charles Rockwell, The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around (New York: Taintor Brothers and Company, 1867), Revised

Sands does not completely reject the importance of ruins to the scenery of the Hudson River Valley, but puts the matter within a definite context, avoiding analogies to the "feudal warfare" associated with European rivers. Thus, he is not on the defensive in associating the Hudson with the noble savage of a past age and the less remote War of Independence. Should the stranger ask

what lore
Of by-gone days, this winding shore,
Yon cliffs and fir-clad steeps could tell,
If vocal made by Fancy's spell, --
The varying legend might rehearse
Fit themes for high, romantic verse.

O'er yon rough heights and moss-clad sod
Oft hath the stalwart warrior trod;
Or peered, with hunter's gaze, to mark
The progress of the glancing bark.
Spoils, strangely won on distant waves,
Have lurked in yon obstructed caves.

When the great strife for Freedom rose
Here scouted oft her friends and foes,
Alternate, through the changeful war,
And beacon-fires flashed bright and far;
And here, when Freedom's strife was won,
Fell, in sad feud, her favoured son;--⁵¹

Everybody felt that West Point was a most remarkable place and like other famed natural wonders, it had many sponsors. Disturnell's Traveller's Guide, one of the most popular in existence during the first part of the nineteenth century advised that

Edition, p. 253.

⁵¹Robert C. Sands, The Writings of Robert C. Sands in Prose and Verse (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1834), Vol. II, pp. 380-81.

no place in the Union, probably, exceeds West Point in beauty of location and stirring incidents connected with its early history, being 'hallowed by the footsteps of Washington and Kosciusko' during the Revolutionary struggle, the interest in which is continued to the present time by its being the residence and school of the future defenders of the Union. 52

For Disturnell, the value of the scenery in the immediate vicinity of West Point clearly increased by virtue of its "stirring" history.

In spite of the importance of historical associations to tourists visiting West Point, the material evidences of that history are meagre. William Darby, an American tourist, reported that in 1818

West Point has itself a solitary appearance and to the west, nought is seen but woods, and mountains in their primitive wilderness. If seclusion from the busy haunts of man can be of any benefit to the students at West Point, they enjoy this advantage to its fullest extent. 53

Twenty years later, Caroline Gilman (1794-1888), a popular American author of poetry and children's books, made a similar observation -- "art has had little do do here; the eye is at once arrested by nature, and as there is nothing in bad taste, the simplicity in what man has done is attractive."⁵⁴

Still, there were some important sites which

⁵²Disturnell, Guide (1864), op. cit., p. 30.

⁵³Darby, op. cit., p. 13.

⁵⁴Caroline Gilman, The Poetry of Travelling in the United States, With Additional Sketches by a Few Friends and A Week Among Autographs by Rev. S. Gilman (New York: S. Colman, 1838), p. 72.

visitors felt obliged to visit, if for no other reason than the popular guidebooks insisted upon their aesthetic value. Disturnell's Guide virtually demanded that tourists visit certain places.

No stranger should leave the Point without visiting the public buildings, Kosciusko's monument, and wild and romantic garden retreat near the water's edge called 'Kosciusko's garden,' the ruins of old Fort Putnam, which commands a view of West Point, the Hudson River, and the surrounding mountain scenery. 55

Fort Putnam was one of the principal ruins easily accessible to the Hudson River's travelling public. Since the "monuments of former ages" were significant elements in ideal images of moral sublimity, to say nothing about aesthetic beauty, ruins of any vintage were grasped as evidence of America's magnificent, if short, political history. In spite of the fact that North America had virgin forests, majestic waterfalls, and other evidences of a glorious, natural history, that Fort Putnam was man-made aided in marketing the Hudson River and its "prospects" to the travelling public. What could be more sublime than beholding a "glorious and inspiring view" from a treasured historical site? At Fort Putnam, a "gentleman from New-York" was inspired to write a poem which H. D. Gilpin reprinted in 1825.

Dreary and lone as the scenes that surround thee,
Thy battlements rise 'mid the crags of the wild,
Yet dear are thy ruins, for brightly around thee,
Twas here the first dawn of our Liberty smiled.

⁵⁵Disturnell, Guide (1864), op. cit., p. 31.

But lonely's thy terrace -- thy walls are forsaken,
 In ruins around thy proud ramparts are low;
 And never again shall thy cannon awaken,
 The echo that sleeps in the valley below.

Silence now reigns thy dark ruins among --
 Where once thrill'd the fife, and the war-drum
 beat loud,
 Now the scream of the eaglet slow gliding along,
 Alone sends its note from the mists of the cloud.

But where are the heroes whose home once was here
 When the legions of tyranny peopled our shore --
 Who here raised the standard of Freedom so clear,
 And guarded their home 'mid the battle's fierce
 roar?

They sleep in yon vale, their rude fortress below,
 Where darkly the shade of the cedar is spread;
 And hoarse through the valley the mountain winds
 blow,
 Where lovely they rest in the sleep of the dead.

The flowers of the forest have brightened that spot,
 The wild rose has scattered its bloom over that
 ground,
 Where lonely they lie--now forgetting--forget--
 Unwak'd by the mountain-storm thund'ring around.⁵⁶

Caroline Gilman also "sallied forth to Kosciusko's Garden," the site of Fort Putnam. Her romantic enthusiasm is hesitant at first, because the "word garden seems to be a misnomer except the cliff and rugged mountain be a warrior's Garden." But then, she understands that precisely this ruggedness gave it a "wild and romantic interest" which, combined with the history of the location, "thrill[ed] the heart in itself and in its associations."⁵⁷ Cobden stood on those revered ramparts of Fort Putnam and described a view which in its general outline was quite

⁵⁶Gilpin, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

⁵⁷Gilman, op. cit., p. 72.

typical.

below is Westpoint upon a peninsula formed by a bend in the river whose winding stream above and below is seen pursuing its tortuous course till it abruptly disappears beyond one of the numerous heights. . . .the gradually sloping banks covered with forest trees -- with here and there a little glen or valley breaking away from between these mountains and presenting patches of ripe corn or shining green pastures -- the innumerable little sailing boats with their white canvas reflecting the morning sunbeams -- the lively looking snowy cottages that are sprinkled over the landscape -- all these charms shut in by a near horizon of mountains that formed a rolling graceful outline to the scene make the view from Fort Putnam one of the loveliest 58 though perhaps not the grandest in America.

The most laudatory description of the view from Fort Putnam was that of Fanny Kemble (1809-1893), the London-born belle of the American stage. A controversial and independent person, less easily swayed by the vagaries of public opinion than Tyrone Power, her extravagant forthrightness about her visits to the natural wonders of upstate New York can not be easily dismissed as the flamboyant exaggerations of an overly romantic actress. Rather, she embodies the feelings of many who travelled up the Hudson while held captive by the aesthetic conservatism and language of Scottish Common Sense Realism. Kemble expressed a mood that pervaded the culture of the day. Few had the courage to express it publicly and then, only at Niagara Falls where such sentiments were almost expected. From Fort Putnam, she

⁵⁸Cobden, op. cit., pp. 122-3. This quotation is taken from the 1835 Diary. See footnote 8.

looked down, and for a moment my heart seemed to stop, the pulsation of my heart to cease -- I was filled with awe. The beauty and wild sublimity of what I beheld seemed almost to crush my faculties, -- I felt dizzy as though my senses were drowning, -- I felt as though I had been carried into the immediate presence of God. Though I were to live a thousand years, I can never forget it. The first thing that I distinctly saw was the shadow of a large cloud, which rolled slowly down the side of a huge mountain, frowning over the height where I stood. The shadow moved down its steep sunny side, threw a deep blackness over the sparkling river, and then passed off and climbed the opposite mountain on the other shore, leaving the world in the full blaze of noon. I could have stretched out my arms, and shouted aloud -- I could have fallen on my knees, and worshipped -- I could have committed any extravagance that ecstasy could suggest. I stood filled with amazement and delight. . . . after going the complete rounds of the ruins, I found out for myself a grassy knoll commanding a full view of the scene, sufficiently far from my party not to hear their voices, and screened from them by some beautiful young cedar bushes; and here I lay down and cried most abundantly, by which means I recovered my senses, which else, I think, must have forsaken me. How full of thought I was! Of God's great might, and gracious goodness, of the beauty of this earth, of the apparent nothingness of man when compared with this huge inanimate creation, of his wondrous value, for whose delight and use all these fair things 59 were created.

Another famous view from West Point, from the "window at the back of the hotel," was cherished more for its civilized conveniences than the wilderness scenery. Here people could sit and take tea while viewing the natural wonders. Also from this place, "so many artists attempted (but oh, how feebly) to put the shades and colors

⁵⁹Kemble, op. cit., pp. 268-9.

of the sky and river on canvas."⁶⁰ The "pictorial mode" was not just a characteristic of written description -- the verbal images of romantic nature were often accompanied by sketches in pen and ink. Just as many American artists knew that they could explore the meanings of their art through prose and poetry, diarists knew that an appropriate sketch complemented written descriptions. Most of these amateur sketches are lost (or undiscovered); known paintings and sketches of the area around West Point are most often the works of professional artists.

Immediately beyond West Point,

the river again assumes a different character . . . it appears like a succession of beautiful lakes, each reach preserving the proportions and appearance of a separate sheet of water, rather than of part of a river. . . .to one in particular, there is a noble background of mountains, removed a few miles from the water, which are thrown together in splendid confusion. ⁶¹

About the "Hillsides" between the Highlands and the Catskills, Kemble seems less enthusiastic, reporting that the

scenery of the Hudson. . . .loses much of its sublimity, though not beauty. The river widens, and the rugged summits of the highlands melt gradually into a softer and more undulating outline. ⁶²

Gilpin, with his preeminent desire to entice travellers up the Hudson, also notices that the "river widens on the

⁶⁰Gilman, op. cit., p. 71.

⁶¹Kemble, op. cit., Vol. II, P. 231.

⁶²Ibid.

right into a considerable bay [Newburgh Bay] " but does not conclude that the "peaceful charm" which accompanies it is any less exciting than the Highland region to the south. On the contrary, it "opens up a prospect which perhaps exceeds every other on the passage." In fact, the widened river serves as an emotional release. The tension of the

mountains. . . .lofty and rude. . . .their
sides formed of very large mossy rocks and
trees. . . .[throwing] a dark shade over the
river beneath [impressing] the whole scene
with sublimity and grandeur

was relieved by the "wide expanse of beautiful and gently elevated country bursting upon the eye."⁶³

There was also a minority opinion. With only a few exceptions, travellers suspended their criticisms in the wash of romantic enthusiasm for the glories of the Hudson Valley. But William Darby (1775-1854) was one person who often differed with the dominant image. Darby, one of the foremost geographers of the day and likewise one of the most well-travelled Americans of the day, suggested that

too much of the land is cleared. A scarcity
of timber strikes the eye of the traveller
at every stop, and the trees which exist have
a stunted appearance.

Darby then goes on to make some generalizations about the settlement of areas such as upstate New York (in particular the Hillsides) and its affect on the natural landscape.

In all the extent of settled country within
the United States, two epochs have preceeded
each other in the progress of agriculture.

⁶³Gilpin, op. cit.

In the first epoch, an immense extent of land is cleared of timber, and the soil rather tortured than cultivated. This lasts until the impoverished fields and ruined forests oblige the farmers to commence the second epoch. They now come to the point from which they ought to have set out. They now cultivate a more limited extent, but that extent by manure and careful routine of crops, becomes annually more and more productive. . . . It is pleasing to see even the germ of a better system. 64

In travelling the first half of the distance from New York to Albany, tourists were exposed, according to Bruce, to examples of grandeur (the Palisades), repose (Tappan Sea), sublimity (the Highlands) and the picturesque (the Hill-sides). I have considered each of these four sections as a unit, as did most of the tourists who wrote about them. Since tourists were reluctant to write descriptions of specific images, one might expect a similar reluctance to make generalizations about this entire stretch of river with such scenic variety. Such was in fact the case.

T. L. McKenney (1785-1859), as Superintendant of Indian Trade (1816-1822) and as head of the Department of Indian Affairs in the War Department (1824-1830), made several trips to the interior of North America. In 1832, he travelled up the Hudson en route to a meeting with the Chippewa, Menominee and Winnebago which resulted in the "treaty" of August 11, 1827 at Battle des Morts on the Fox River. In a general reference to the Highlands, McKenney

⁶⁴Darby, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

again isolates that "surprising grandeur" and "enchanted sublimity" which attracted travellers to the Hudson.

I would, if I dare, attempt some description . . . of the Hudson, winding its way around the bases of the mountains that project into it at so many points. I would delight, if I could, in making you see these broken up mountains, these towering heights, that stretch away off into the sky; and the crooked and pent-up river in which their bases rest; but that is not possible. You need never expect to comprehend anything in relation to the Highlands until you see them. 65

The image which best summarized the experience of travellers on the Hudson is one of "change, contrast and ceaseless variety." For Europeans, this could "only be seen and believed by crossing the Atlantic."⁶⁶ But Americans felt the same way. The Hudson River presented

diversity of great aspect. . . . plains of great beauty and fertility. . . . as far as the eye can reach, irrigated by numerous and copious streams. . . . gently ascending hills and declining vales. Some tracts abound in picturesque and romantic prospects, such as rugged hills, lofty mountains, craggy rocks, deep vallies, narrow winding dells, headlong torrents and abrupt cataracts. Everywhere beauteous nature presents us with new and varied scenes, which partake either of the beautiful, picturesque or romantic kinds. . . . Sometimes, she presents them all in the same view. 67

There were many types of contrast identified. Light and shadow played upon the openings in the mountains and turns in the river, producing a rich landscape of greens

⁶⁵McKenney, op. cit., p. 41.

⁶⁶Trollope, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 259.

⁶⁷Macauley, op. cit., p. 2.

and blues, from the dark, ominous chasm or the calm-shaded pool at the side of the noble stream, to the sun-bleached fresh-cut hay field or the softness of a summer sky. "At every moment, the scene varied; at every moment, new beauty and grandeur was revealed to us."⁶⁸ The endless shades and hues of color were enriched by being reflected off a landscape of great topographical variety. McKenney, in reference to the Palisades, describes this in stark terms.

Upon the one side, the east, are hills, green and soft, and beautiful, rolling in their course; and upon the other, stone bolt upright without a sign of vegetation except the shrubbery at the top. 69

Even bracketing the contrast between wilderness and farm, city and village, Gideon Davison remarked that it was "difficult to find anywhere a journey [with] the same" contrasts of scenery.⁷⁰ An "impossible boundary," fertile plains, rushing waters, placid lake-like bays, large town, "impenetrable" forests -- all this was "indeed considered peculiar to the Hudson."⁷¹ Well-travelled William Darby went so far as to suggest that these seventy-five miles contained "almost all the variety that the face

⁶⁸Kemble, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 263.

⁶⁹McKenney, op. cit., p. 32.

⁷⁰Gideon Miner Davison, The Fashionable Tour in 1825. An Excursion to the Springs, Niagara, Quebec, and Boston (Saratoga Springs, Published by the Author, 1825), p. 28. This volume was first published in 1822. Later editions were revised and enlarged and issued under the title: "The Traveller's Guide Through The Middle and Northern States."

⁷¹Darby, op. cit., p. 28.

of the earth can afford."⁷²

To understand this emphasis on variety and contrast, we must again recall the aesthetic ideals of beauty, sublimity and the picturesque. Despite what may seem to be Bruce's arbitrary assignment of a particular ideal to each of the "divisions or reaches" of the Hudson, Bruce's analysis helps us understand the meanings of these terms. The intention of labelling the Highlands "sublime" was to convey the tension between the civilized comfort of human-kind and the immediacy of an overpowering physical force or barrier at once attractive in its grandeur and repulsive in its destructive potential. The dark, uncertain sublime beyond the neat, limited and prettified places of human habitation held a curious fascination among the early nineteenth century fashionable elite. For example, the "repose" of Tappan Sea, the soft, smooth and unthreatening calm of a wide expanse of water, widened the distance between natural disaster and man's recognition of them, although if a thunder storm had arisen, no doubt the prospect would have indeed been sublime. On a warm, sunny summer day, Tappan Sea, with its lovely arcadian villas dotting the banks, was the image of gentlemanly ease and plentitude. It was within the bounds of human understanding and control.

The sublimity of the Highlands contrasted with the "repose" of Tappan Sea. But in the Hillsides, though on a lesser scale, they were both present. "Repose" and

⁷²Darby, op. cit., p. 28.

"sublimity" together exemplified another aesthetic ideal, the picturesque.

To the gratification derived from a prospect of repose and the sublime objects of nature, the effect of the most striking contrast is added, to render the scene truly picturesque and enchanting. 73

It was the middle landscape, a hesitant compromise between the rude, threatening character of the sublime and the bland stillness of repose. The "picturesque" was not wholly satisfactory to those who hungered for the immediacy of the grand and uncontrolled and longed for a beauty which involved more than the peace of an all-encompassing view.

Naming the picturesque required a degree of cultural sophistication not attained by all who travelled the fashionable Hudson in search of the sublime and the beautiful. It was a less well known concept, for following the publication of Edmund Burke's Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, the term emerged in response to a complex controversy regarding the correct meaning of the "sublime" and the "beautiful."⁷⁴ Darby implies as much in observing that a "variegated country can give gratification to a refined taste." Even "gratification" in the contrast between the natural landscape and ruins could not be taken for granted. It too was a

⁷³Davison, op. cit., p. 128.

⁷⁴See further chapter one and Christopher Hussey, The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: Cass, 1967). This pioneer work in the field of visual romanticism was first published in 1927.

learned aesthetic preference and the product of a "refined taste." "To view the edifice [at West Point] amid so many natural contrasts"⁷⁵ was more pleasurable than viewing one edifice among a group of edifices, or one tree in a forest of trees.

"Refined taste" also implied the ability to judge the proper harmony between contrasting elements. While only the "eyes of correct taste" could legitimately make this judgment, no one explained what was correct, for it was well known that the dual influence of Romanticism and Scottish Common Sense Realism set the aesthetic standard. Thomas Hamilton (1789-1842), neighbor of Sir Walter Scott, friend of William Wordsworth and Professor of Anatomy and Botany at the University of Glasgow, exhibited "correct" taste in his Men and Manners in America (1833), a highly popular, humorous account of an earlier trip to the New World.

everything [was] in its proper place, and the dimensions most proper to contribute to the general effect. Add elevation to the mountains, and the consequence of the river would be diminished. Increase the expanse of river and you improve the grandeur of the mountains. As it is, there is perfect subordination of parts, and the result is something on which the eye loves to gaze, and the heart to meditate, which tinges our dreams with beauty, and often in distant lands will recur, unbidden, to the imagination. 76

⁷⁵Darby, op. cit., p. 289.

⁷⁶Thomas Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (New York: A. M. Kelley Reprints of Economic Classics, 1968), Vol. II, pp. 287-88. This two volume work was originally published in 1833.

Intellectual preparation led to the view that "charm lay in the combination, in the exquisite harmony of detail which produces -- if I may so write, a synthetic beauty of the highest order."⁷⁷ The influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism was predominant here, for it had established specific physical requirements and relationships for the "highest order" of aesthetic pleasure.⁷⁸ Hamilton's image was a composition, an arrangement like that of an artist whose pen or brush adjusts the elements of a landscape to compositional requirements prescribed by a particular aesthetic.

Before the Civil War, the Hudson River Valley was the favorite location in America for reflection on another aspect of contrast. The dichotomy between the wilderness condition and the invasion of European civilization was central to Europe's struggle to justify her history and her future in the face of New World excitement as well as being central to white America's struggle to develop a national identity over against the parent lands. Basil Hall noted the starkness of the contrast.⁷⁹ William Darby seemed to echo Hall's observations.

Within a few paces of the cultivated farm, or 'busy mill' we might have imagined ourselves transported to the abodes of primeval silence; we could have conceived ourselves carried back to the primitive ages, when cultivation had neither disfigured or [sic] adorned the face

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸See especially Archibald Alison, cf. Chapter 1, footnote 82.

⁷⁹See p. 130.

of the earth. Many of the dells, dark and deep, overshadowed with oaks, pine, cedar and maple, seemed to have never been before visited by human beings; the turn of a step dispelled the illusion, by disclosing the gay aspect of a garden, orchard, field and meadow. . . .I had often seen the rapid change, from the savage waste to the highly decorated abode of civilized man, but I do not remember to have been, ever before, so strongly impressed with the contrast. 80

What Hall and Darby noticed was almost universally recognized by the fashionable tourists. Less common and on another level were reflections on the meaning of the contrast, particularly the vale of the pre-civilized condition, the wilderness itself. As one might expect, there were various responses. British travellers, accustomed to properly designed and maintained English gardens, a development which John Bartram had done so much to foster, were annoyed to discover that few American gardens were constructed according to the principles of English landscape gardening. Therefore, British travellers tended to reflect on the lack of a civilized landscape, rather than the meaning of the stark contrast between the wilderness and the "first fruits" of civilization or the meaning of the wilderness itself. Characteristic were the feelings of Isaac Candler, who reported to his English readers in 1824.

In no part is cultivation so finished as to exhibit all the charms of which it is susceptible; hence, where nature has not been liberal, travelling, as far as external appearances contribute to enjoyment, is

⁸⁰Darby, op. cit., p. 31.

simplicity, while enough is created by art to gratify the wants of civilized man."⁸⁴ For Darby, the Hudson River Valley was such a "middle landscape," full of "scattered villages, where every species of civilization seemed blended" with nature.⁸⁵

Closely related to "art" was "taste." "Taste" resulted from the adjustment of "nature" to conform with the ideals of "art." In describing a section of the Hudson's east bank across from Newburgh, Caroline Gilman observed that

probably one of the most exquisite combinations of natural beauty is here, and it is heightened by the hand of taste. Gardens in luxuriant bloom, choice hot house plants, a lawn of velvet softness on one side of the river, on the other mountains so near as to look down upon the very roses of the gardens -- and then, the elegant arrangement within -- books, music, and the mind's lighter recreations. 86

Particularly the "gentleman's country-seats and farmhouses" impressed those who sought the tasteful landscape. The reader of Gilpin's guidebook was instructed that they made the scene

highly interesting. . . .The traveller passes along the shore, beholding villas, farms, towns spread upon it, covering it with animation, wealth and beauty. 87

George P. Morris (1802-1864), best known as editor of the New-York Mirror and Ladies' Literary Gazette, built a

⁸⁴Darby, op. cit., p. 23.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Gilman, op. cit., p. 70.

⁸⁷Gilpin, op. cit., p. 35.

Chapter 4:
Pine Orchard

From a strictly religious. . . .point of view,God himself reared the everlasting mountains and perpetual hills, as emblems impressive of Almighty power and endless duration; thus ever teaching us lessons of humility and awe, upon which it is well for us to consider ourselves, and to urge upon others. . . .Mountains too, as rearing their bare and lofty heads to heaven, and pointing thither, hoary with age, or crowned with glittering whiteness and spotless purity, like those which cheer and bless the world of life and light on high; as thus lofty, and thus crowned, they have been the chosen places of the Divine presence and power on earth, and forever stand as consecrated monuments of the greatness and glory of God, as made known to man in connection with them. . . . But aside from. . . .their great religious and moral teachings, which may be known and read by all, there is also a direct spiritual lesson. . . .[in] read[ing] the Book of Nature which God has spread before¹ us.

In introducing the last of Bruce's five "divisions" of the Hudson River, the Rev. Charles Rockwell makes a distinction between the "religious teachings" and the "spiritual lessons" of the Catskill Mountains. On the one hand, Rockwell identifies two essential "religious teachings" using as evidence the Hebrew legends involving Mt. Ararat, Mt. Sinai, Mt. Moriah, Mt. Tabor, and Mt. Olivet. (1) The overwhelming physical presence, both in space and in time, makes man's size and tenure on earth seem insignificant. (2) Pure and lofty, compared to the plain of everyday existence, these "monuments of God's greatness"

¹Charles Rockwell, The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around: Their Scenery, Legends and History; with Sketches in Prose and Verse by Cooper, Irving, Bryant, Cole and Others (New York: Taintor Brothers and Company, 1867), Revised Edition, pp. vi-vii.

symbolize the "presence and power" of God on earth.

On the other hand, the "spiritual lessons" are not so much embodied in the physical facts of height and mass, as in the opportunity mountains provide to "read the Book of Nature." From mountain tops, great numbers of people were able to view a significantly larger portion of their physical environment in one image than ever before. To "read" the image was a "spiritual lesson." It was, for the early nineteenth century, similar to the experiences of astronauts who have seen "spaceship earth" from a vehicle orbiting the earth. Even in today's secular environment, astronauts have been moved to reflect on the processes of creation, the fragile beauty of the earth, and the unity of all life. Rockwell, like the astronauts, did not attempt to explain this except to observe that there are

Tongues in trees, sermons in stones,
Books in the running brooks, and good ²
in everything.

The content of the nineteenth century lesson will become clearer as we "read" the images of those who visited the Catskills.

Charles Rockwell (1806-1882), a pastor of no particular distinction was a dedicated traveller and nature enthusiast whose only importance rests with two travel books published in 1842 and 1867 (revised edition). The

²Ibid. Rockwell quotes Shakespeare, As You Like It, Act III, Scene 1, line 2.

first, Sketches of Foreign Travel and Life at Sea³ recorded a wanderlust which his days as a Chaplain in the United States Navy had apparently not quenched. The second, The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around,⁴ remains the best anthology of fashionable Catskillian images and memories by early nineteenth century poets, artists and tourists who came to pay their respects to the wonder of lower New York State. As pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church of Catskill, New York, Rockwell not only had a unique opportunity to absorb the prevailing aesthetic mood of his day, but fortunately had the foresight to collect and preserve the written images of many who passed through his town, the gateway to the Catskills.⁵

³Charles Rockwell, Sketches of Foreign Travel and Life at Sea (Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1842).

⁴Rockwell, The Catskill Mountains, op. cit. Although the 1867 edition is "revised," I have not been able to discover any confirmation of an earlier edition. All further references to Rockwell are to this 1867 volume.

⁵In the preface to The Catskill Mountains, Rockwell describes his move to Catskill, New York. "Early in the year 1860, the writer, or more properly the compiler, of this work, was led, by professional duty, and the healthful climate of mountains, to make his home in a place of peculiar and romantic beauty, on one of the lower cliffs of the Catskill range, directly in front of the high projection on which the Mountain House stands" (p. iii). He also indicates the rationale for his work. "In preparing this work, the writer has thought, incorrectly it may be, that its historical and traditional matter, with the glowing record and description of mountain scenery, legends, and history, by some of the most gifted and brilliant writers of our own and other lands, would be scarcely less interest and value to the general reader than to those who visit the mountains. It is also true of most who visit there that they see but a small part of the most interesting scenery, and may hence wish to learn what they can of it from the pages of a book such as this" (p. iv).

No European traveller ever thinks of leaving it [the Catskill Mountain House] unvisited. The Catskills and Niagara Falls are the two points [in the tourist's America] known everywhere.

6

Although published in 1873, these sentences echo a sentiment characteristic of the whole century, and it applied to Americans as well. The Catskill Mountain House, erected in 1823, was located at the eastern edge of Bartram's fir grove which for some time had been known as "Pine Orchard."⁷ Although not an orchard and with only scattered pines among the firs, Pine Orchard, "the glory of the Hudson," was indeed a high point of the fashionable tour. As early as 1825, Gideon Davison, a writer of guide-books, could report that

Pine Orchard [is] a place which, for several years past, has attracted the attention of all classes of men, and still continues to draw. . . . numbers of those who are fond of

⁶ Wallace Bruce, The Hudson River by Daylight (New York: John Featherstone, 1873), p. 65. John Featherstone was the proprietor of newstands on the Day Line, a steamboat company.

⁷ Before the Civil War, the terms "Pine Orchard" and "Catskills" were used interchangeably to refer to a relatively small acreage in what is now known as the "high peaks area" of the Catskill Mountains, west of Catskill, New York. The Catskill Mountains outside the vicinity of Pine Orchard were virtually unknown to the fashionable tourist. The only mountains of importance were at Pine Orchard. Similarly, since the only available public transportation to Pine Orchard was owned and operated by the owner of the Catskill Mountain House, a visit to the former assured a visit to the latter. Therefore, Pine Orchard and the Catskill Mountain House were virtually synonymous in the public mind. This led to the retrospectively curious anomaly that, until the competing Kaaterskill Hotel was opened in 1881, the Catskill Mountain House and the Catskills were also practically synonymous. This is certainly implied in the quotation from Bruce, footnote 6. For an indication of the history of "Bartram's fir grove," see chapter 2.

novelty, and especially of the sublime and romantic scenery in which it abounds.⁸

Pine Orchard was one of the two most important wilderness retreats in ante-bellum America. Catskillian views and scenes became the characteristic images of American mountains etched on the minds of persons who pursued nature in travel,⁹ in art galleries (recall the work of Thomas Cole and the other Hudson River painters),¹⁰ in romantic poetry (the Knickerbocker poets and particularly William Cullen Bryant rhapsodized on the Catskill's beauty), and in prose descriptions. For as Harriet Martineau wrote (remembering that the Catskills were part of "the Hudson"),

However widely European travellers have differed about other things in America, all seem to agree in their love for the Hudson.¹¹

⁸Gideon M. Davison, The Fashionable Tour in 1825. An Excursion to the Springs, Niagara, Quebec and Boston (Saratoga Springs: Published by the author, 1825), p. 140. The first edition was published in 1822. Later editions, revised and enlarged, were issued with the title The Traveller's Guide Through the Middle and Northern States.

⁹The other important mountain range, the White Mountains in New Hampshire, did not attract tourists in the same numbers as did the Catskills before the Civil War. This was partly due to their location. See further Thomas Starr King, The White Hills: Their Legends, Landscapes and Poetry (Boston: Crosby and Nichols, 1859) for an excellent introduction to the early images of that mountain range.

¹⁰The close relationship between early nineteenth century art and literature, particularly in relation to the Catskills is well documented in James T. Callow, Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807-1855 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

¹¹Harriet Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 224).

Rockwell's attempt to capture the meaning of the Catskills from a "strictly religious. . . .point of view" failed not because it was wrong, but because it was inadequate. Just as it is impossible to make a legitimate separation between Scottish Common Sense Realism and Romanticism as they were commonly understood and expressed by the travelling public in North America, the attempt to separate the "religious. . . .point of view" from the aesthetic context is equally fruitless. Nineteenth century travel literature emerges from a fabric of aesthetics, the intellectual threads of which were a strong but subtle warp of conservative Common Sense Realism and an increasingly aggressive and contrasting weft of literary romanticism. In retrospect, this fabric is clearly characterized by a subdued spirituality common to people of various religious affiliations and national backgrounds who visited America's natural wonders. Most travellers did not have the sophistication or interest to analyze the history and relationships of these threads, as did James Marsh and Thomas Cooper.¹² They were interested in the feel of the fabric. Spirituality and aesthetic awareness were not generally subjected to intellectual scrutiny. But the mountains of which Rockwell speaks were not only physical forms. They were also the icons of an uncritical spirituality.

¹²See Chapter 1, pp. 33-36.

The fashionable (and only) destination in the Catskills was Pine Orchard, "elevated 3000 feet above the tide-waters of the Hudson, which noble stream afforded a varied and extensive view of the greatest interest."¹³ On the summit was a "large and commodious public house called the Mountain House, for the accommodation of visitors who resort here in great numbers during the summer months."¹⁴ Just as the steamboats, ostensibly

¹³_____, A Gazetteer of the State of New York, Comprising its Topography, Geology, Mineralogical Resources, Civil Divisions, Canals, Railroads, and Public Institutions, Together with General Statistics. . . . (Albany: John Disturnell, 1842), p. 324. Disturnell published a great number of tourbooks, guidebooks and similar material. The compiling of this Gazetteer is often attributed to O. H. Holley.

¹⁴The history of the Mountain House is traced in Roland Van Zandt, The Catskill Mountain House (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1966). It is helpful, as background for a discussion of wilderness imagery, to examine briefly the Mountain House itself. Basil Hall gives some insight into the erection of the House.

Pine Orchard had long been a resort of picnic parties from New York and Albany, even when the worthy citizens had to find their way up or down the river in sailing boats. But upon the introduction of steam, the number of visitors increased so rapidly, that the slender accommodations afforded to the clouds of tourists by a few miserable sheds was quite inadequate. One of the enterprising companies, however, which abound in this country, soon found, in a money speculation, a remedy for the matter. Straightaway, there rose up, like an exhalation, a splendid hotel, on the very brink of the precipice, some five and twenty hundred feet above the water.

(Basil Hall, Travels in North America, in the years 1827 and 1828 (Philadelphia, 1829), in three volumes, p. 94. Also printed in Edinburgh for R. Cadell in 1830.)

Hall's description of the process is considerably less romantic than a typical tour description published about the same time. The actual elevation of the House above the Hudson was far less than the round figure (of three

built to transport travellers along the Hudson River, themselves became objects of traveller curiosity, the Mountain

thousand feet) which was accepted by most travellers. It was well known, and ignored, that the elevation of the House was closer to Basil Hall's estimate. Similarly, Hall's financial speculators were easily transformed into a self-indulgent group of "gentlemen" who desired such a palace for their own convenience. Gilpin's Northern Tour reflects this established tourist rationale.

There is, on the top of the mountain, and no less than three thousand feet above the level of the Hudson, an excellent and extensive House of entertainment. It was built by a company of gentlemen, anxious to enjoy, during the heat of summer, the cool, refreshing and migrating breezes of so elevated a spot. On approaching the spot, it has the appearance of a cage hung out on the cliff of the precipice, and the traveller is at a loss to imagine how it is ever to be reached. Nowhere can a few weeks of summer be more agreeably spent. The House affords every comfort that can be wished. (Henry D. Gilpin, A Northern Tour: Being a Guide to Saratoga Springs, Lake George, Niagara, Canada. . . . Embracing an Account of the Canals, Colleges, Public Institutions, Natural Curiosities, etc. (Philadelphia: H. D. Carey and I. Lea, 1825), p. 43.)

The aura of sentimentality which surrounded the Mountain House is apparent in the descriptions of most travellers and tour guides who wrote so reverently of the "palace." Yet the observation of Basil Hall that the hotel was a straight-forward business venture and Arfwedson's surprising revelation that during the cholera epidemic of 1833, he was "nearly alone in the large establishment" (C. D. Arfwedson, The United States and Canada, in 1832, 1833, and 1834 (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1834), Vol. I, p. 69) should caution us against believing that the House was a success on all counts. Alf Evers, whose concern for residents, their lives and their economic situation contrasts with my interest in the images of those who visited the region, shrewdly punctured the illusion of Yankee financial invincibility and ingenuity by observing that "the Mountain House had succeeded as a romantic shrine, but even in the lush years before 1833, it had failed as a business venture." (Alf Evers, The Catskills: From Wilderness to Woodstock (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972), p. 381.) See further, Chapter 50, "'This Olympic Retreat'" and Chapter te, "Public Confidence is Shaken."

House also became as much the reason for the journey up Kaaterskill Clove as the famous "view from the top." DeVeaux admits as much, though probably unintentionally, in his tourbook introduction to the northeast's natural wonders.

The Mountain House, and the majestic scenery of the Catskill Mountains, are much frequented¹⁵ by travellers.

That the Mountain House was the best known mountain resort in the United States is indicated by the fact that seldom was the Greek Revival structure identified by the name of the mountain range in which it was located. Disturnell, DeVeaux, their colleagues, and the travellers for whom they wrote, knew that there was only one Mountain House. Not only was it the best known; it was also on a par with the most luxurious hotels in New York City.¹⁶

¹⁵Samuel DeVeaux, The Traveller's Own Book to Saratoga Springs, Niagara Falls and Canada Containing Routes, Distances, Conveyances, Expenses, Use of Mineral Waters, Baths, Description of Scenery, etc. A Complete Guide, For the Valetudinarian and for the Tourist, Seeking For Pleasure and Amusement. With Maps and Engravings (Buffalo: Faxon and Read, 1841), pp. 26-27.

¹⁶With respect to the facilities and accommodations of the House, Gilpin reported that it "afford[ed] every comfort that can be wished." (Gilpin, op. cit.) With few exceptions, tourists applauded the food, service, and miscellaneous amenities, often wondering how such fashionable accommodations could possibly exist in such a location. Elizabeth Ellet reported her impressions.

It is spacious enough to accommodate a very large number of guests, having double and triple rows of goodly dormitories, all of a better size, and more comfortably furnished, than the sleeping rooms usually appropriated to travellers at the fashionable watering-places. The drawing-rooms are spacious; the principal one consisting of three large

It drew many tourists for whom the I-was-there-too syndrome was as central a motivation for travel as the

saloons opening into each other, or rather forming one. The dining room is large enough for a feudal banqueting hall, its effect being increased by a range of pillars for the whole length down the centre; and these pillars are wreathed with evergreens, while between the numerous windows stand hemlock or cedar trees during the season, quite in baronial taste. As far as I know, this style of embellishment is unique; it is certainly very picturesque. (Elizabeth Ellet, Reprinted in Rockwell, op. cit., as "The Fourth at Pine Orchard," pp. 230ff.)

In spite of the general favor with which the Mountain House was received, the model of a rural American gentleman, Nathaniel Parker Willis (1806-1867), was bold enough to complain gently of both the location and the amenities offered to the travelling public by the Mountain House. His effort must be considered one of the more anomalous by this legendary promotor of picturesque American scenery.

No place so agreeable as Catskill, after one has been parboiled in the city. . . . The Mountain House on the Catskill, it should be remarked, is a luxurious hotel. How the proprietor can have dragged up, and keeps dragging up, so many superfluities from the river level to the eagle's nest, excites your wonder. It is the more strange, because in climbing a mountain, the feeling is natural that you leave such enervating indulgences behind.

The mountain-top is too near heaven. It should be a monastery to lodge so high. . . . (Nathaniel Parker Willis, (Rockwell, op. cit., pp. 219-220.))

Though Willis found that the Mountain House was too luxurious for his rural taste Harriet Martineau, after an extended and laudatory description of the food and accommodations, concluded her praise for the House with this unusual reason. She thanked the management devoutly for harboring us on any terms, so that we might think out our thoughts, and compose our emotions, and take our fill of that portion of our universal and eternal inheritance.

(Martineau, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 229.))

For further information on the interior of the Mountain House, see Van Zandt, op. cit., pp. 38-41, 61-62.

desire to retreat into America's wilderness. Although an important rest stop for seekers of the sublime and beautiful, the Mountain House was a man-made appendage to the natural American scenery and is therefore of peripheral concern to this study.

For most, the Mountain House did not significantly detract from the wilderness of its immediate environment. Under the theory that art (in this case, the Mountain House) could complement and even enhance the beauty of nature, visitors to Pine Orchard almost universally welcomed the construction of the Mountain House in 1823. A notable exception was the Rev. Benjamin Dorr, whose wilderness sensibilities were offended by the intrusion of a Greek Revival facade into a wilderness. He reported in 1823 that

the Mountain House is a spacious, elegant, and convenient building, but not more comfortable and far less appropriate [*italics mine*] to the wild scenery around, than the rude cottage I found here last 17 fall.

The road to Pine Orchard began at the Hudson River; Pine Orchard and the Mountain House were twelve miles by stage from the town of Catskill, where the steamers docked. From the river, Bacon believed that the Catskills exemplified "beauty," for they were distant enough to assume a required peacefulness and calm. On closer inspection,

¹⁷ Benjamin Dorr, A Journal of Tours (Manuscript, Cornell University Library Archives and Manuscripts, #23), p. 49.

they appeared differently, as we shall see. Initially, the immediate unstudied image was most important. Also from the surface of the river, John Duncan reflected on his trip to Pine Orchard before the construction of the Mountain House as well as before the publication of Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle (1820). Irving's fantastic Rip was reported to have fallen asleep at a U-turn in the road from the town of Catskill to Pine Orchard. Duncan speaks in general, though revealing terms.

Whoever has made a voyage upon the Hudson must remember the Kaatskill mountains; they are. . . .seen away to the west of the River, rising up to a noble height and lording over the surrounding scenery. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains. . . .When the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple, and print their bold outlines on a clear evening sky; but sometimes when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of great vapours about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory.

The reader must have recognized the introduction of Rip Van Winkle. The author has often regretted that The Sketch-Book did not appear until after his return to his native country; he would otherwise have gathered more information respecting the scenery which it has immortalized, and among the rest, about the Kaatskill Mountains, which on two other occasions, he passed in good day light, without anticipating that they were so soon to acquire celebrity from the events to which he has alluded. ¹⁸

¹⁸John M. Duncan, Travels Through Part of the United States and Canada in 1818 and 1819 (Glasgow: Printed at the University Press for Hurst, Robinson, and Company, London, 1823), Vol. I, pp. 320-21. Duncan was a Scotsman. Washington Irving published the Sketch-Book in its first complete English edition in London in 1820. He published

To reach the Mountain House and the "unrivalled view" from Pine Orchard required a laborious trip by stage over a decrepit pike. Before 1820, the trip was unredeemed by any historical interest or association, but after 1820, the adventures of Rip Van Winkle teased those who were transported through his now famous haunts. Before reaching the winding ascent up the mountain, "nature lovers" travelled through a highly fertile cultivated valley of about three miles. William Leete Stone (1792-1844), a journalist and historian who in 1821 became editor of the New York Commercial Advertiser, wrote voluminously on history, social and political matters, and travel experiences in the Catskills. Of the Kaaterskill Valley, he observed in 1824 that

The traveller is here cheered by one of the most charming landscapes, though of small extent, that we recollect to have seen. The beauty of this romantic spot is undoubtedly heightened by contrast with the country around. . . .The Cauterskill. . . .winds its way through the valley. The eye lingers on the rich fields and green meadows, diversified with fruit and forest trees, with delight. 19

Once past the three-mile valley, a nine-mile ascent was in store for both the hardy and the delicate. On the same trip in which Bayard Taylor explained some associations attending the Highlands,²⁰ he also took his visitors

several groups of four or five sketches in New York in 1819-20, of which the story of Rip-Van Winkle was one.

¹⁹William Leete Stone, Quoted in Rockwell, op. cit., pp. 72-73. The Cauterskill is the stream whose waterfalls, often referred to as the Cauterskill Falls, Mitchill and Dwight visited (see chapter 2).

²⁰See chapter 3.

to the Mountain House. A young, mildly bohemian hero among travellers, Taylor, who had rambled through much of Europe "afoot" with only a "knapsack and staff," suggested that

there are few summits so easy of access -- certainly no other mountain resort in our country, where the facilities of getting up and down are so complete and satisfactory.

Taylor's view was, however, heroic and definitely in the minority. He goes on.

reaching the foot of the mountain, the character of the scenery changes. The trees of Rip Van Winkle's Dell are large and luxuriant-leaved, while the backward views, enframed with foliage and softly painted by the blue pencil of the air, 21 grow more charming as you ascend.

"Softly painted. . . .enframed views" -- one might think a sketch was contemplated. Furthermore, charm appears to increase in direct proportion to the observer's height above the river.

Taylor was well aware of his imagery -- he hints at its source in a preface to his brief description of the Hudson River Valley.

It is easy to say with the schoolgirls, 'I adore Nature!' -- but he who adores never criticizes. 'What a beautiful view!' everyone may cry: 'Why is it beautiful?' would puzzle many to answer. Long study, careful

²¹ Bayard Taylor, Reprinted in Rockwell, op. cit., p. 253. See further Bayard Taylor, Views Afoot (1846), as well as a recent study by Richard Cary, The Genteel Circle: Bayard Taylor and His New York Friends (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1952), Cornell Studies in American History, Literature and Folklore, #5.

observation, and various standards of comparison are necessary -- as much so as in art -- to enable one to pronounce upon the relative excellence of scenery. ²²

Given Taylor's extended travels in Europe and his first-hand acquaintance with the principal aesthetic works of the day, theoretical, practical, literary and artistic, it is not difficult to identify these "standards" as a pragmatic Americanized version of Scottish Common Sense aesthetics and literary Romanticism.

Taylor approaches Pine Orchard. Perhaps one might expect that travellers through a dense forest area would mention the "large and luxuriant-leaved" trees, or even identify certain species such as the "red blossoms of the showy rubus and the pale blush of the laurel."²³ We are reminded of the naturalist whose primary concern was identification and categorization rather than the total view. Yet naturalistic tendencies were not common among Romantic travellers whose preference for the grand scene led them to ignore individual species. The rise of Romanticism in America masked the underlying realism of Common Sense to such an extent that it must be counted as one reason why botany and natural history were slow to develop in American schools. Whereas the European elite were taught botany as a matter of course, Americans, with rare exceptions, often accumulated their botanical knowledge

²²Ibid., p. 252.

²³Ibid., p. 253.

from extra-curricular European adventures and other self-education projects. This vacuum in American education tended to encourage the development of pure science, since natural history was often considered merely a topic for amateurs.

Furthermore, the relative compactness of the European theatre and the resultant European feeling of intimacy with nature contrasts with the overwhelming bounty of the American landscape, a bounty which tended to make the intimate concern for individual species secondary to an interest in the broad vista.²⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that Taylor's meagre botanical information emerges from one whose fame rested on reports of European travel to the American public. Contrast this with the lavish identification of species by C. D. Arfwedson, an Englishman who spent the years 1832-34 travelling in American. He too reports on the road to Pine Orchard. It

twists itself from left to right along the sides of the mountain through a thick wood of various trees, such as cedar, fir, locust, white oak, maple, birch, ash, mountain ash, walnut, hazel, chestnut, cherry, wild apple, etc. all growing close to each other, as if of the same species. The wild vine, twisted around the trunks of trees, appeared endeavoring to unite those which in our

²⁴This dichotomy between European intimacy and American broadness should not be construed to mean that Americans were not interested in detail. The landscape paintings of the Hudson River School will convince the reader that at least some were vitally interested in aesthetic detail, though it is important to observe that this concern did not issue in significant naturalistic endeavors, at least on a large and institutional scale.

hemisphere grow far asunder; like irreconcilable enemies. This mixture of trees is a peculiarity characteristic of American woods, and gives to the landscape a variegated appearance. 25

Elizabeth F. L. Ellet (1818-1877), a reserved, highly literate American author and historian who seemed to be happiest when studying and writing,²⁶ was noted for her patriotic and romantic love of nature. In one of her several collections of miscellany, Rambles About the Country (1840), she reflects in a characteristically detached manner about a Fourth of July she spent at Pine Orchard. To get there, she

wound along a precipice, just steep enough and high enough to be perilous and pleasant. The vivid green of the foliage everywhere, and the verdure of the meadows, was most refreshing. . . . Here and there you pass a picturesque dell; one of them is filled with the sound of a distant waterfall, doubtless worth a pilgrimage to see; and frequently you are arrested by the tiny voice of some adventurous rill, flinging itself impetuously down the hillside, and hastening to its burial in the valley's depths. 27

Ellet's imagery is wonderfully romantic -- she uses the right words, mentions the right scenes and suggests the right fears. Compared to the image of the same road in Gordon's Gazette, one can almost imagine that there was a set of descriptive guidelines prepared for Romantic

²⁵Arfwedson, op. cit., p. 67.

²⁶Elizabeth Ellet's still remarkably useful studies on women in American History were among the first of that genre. See further Women of the American Revolution (1848), Domestic History of the American Revolution (1850) and Pioneer Women of the West (1852).

²⁷Ellet, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 230).

travellers. The road, "often running upon the brink of a deep ravine, or beneath frown-precipices, excites an unwelcome degree of terror."²⁸ Tyrone Power helps explain these images and echoes Timothy Twight in suggesting that the "terror" was induced by "glimpses of the . . . nether world."²⁹

Ellet continues her version with a confusing image. She found such an abundance of "beauty" that she could not apply the aesthetic typology used to describe the scenery of the Hudson River. The scenery overwhelmed her romantic sensibilities and the neat categories of the river below were no longer appropriate. The mountains seemed to grow taller; a "fathomless valley, perfectly dark with verdure" appeared.

I looked to see a Rip Van Winkle emerge from its shades. . . . Rolling on with the merciless velocity of stagecoaches, we came to the spot where the steep ascent commences; and here I was fain, with many others, to alight and walk,

fearing that the stage horses might fail under the burden of herself and her companions. It is all romantic affect, for as she admits, she was a "habitual coward" and knew

²⁸Gordon's Gazette, Reprinted in John W. Barber and Irving Howe, Historical Collections of the State of New York; Containing a General Collection of the Most Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, etc. Relating to Its History and Antiquities with Geographical Descriptions of Every Township in the State (New York: Published for the Authors by S. Tuttle, 194 Chatham Square, 1841), p. 184.

²⁹Tyrone Power, Impressions of America, Quoted in Rockwell, op. cit., p. 217. See chapter 2, p. 108.

that the coach was fitted with a device to prevent "retro-grade motion." She walked on.

The winding road closely embowered with foliage, is here picturesque in the extreme. Almost every turn brings some new beauty to view, and the woods are white with the blossoms of the mountain laurel, of which our party bore away numerous trophies. The precipice on the right overhangs the road, but the rocks are concealed by a bright mantle of green. The mountain towers into still grander elevation as you ascend it. 30

These confused images contrast with the dexterity with which Willis Gaylord Clark (1808-1841) describes his trip up the mountain. Poet, editor and publicist, Clark was a deeply religious man who died too young to make a lasting mark on American culture. His sensibilities did, however, lead Edgar Allen Poe to observe that Clark was "almost the first poet to render the poetry of religion attractive."³¹ The difference is that Clark had a controlling image, a religious image, which contrasts with the diffuse sentimentality of Ellet. Calmness reigns in the valley of "pastoral tranquility."

Meanwhile you are a plain-traveller, a quiet man. All at once you are wheeled upon a vernal theatre. . . .at whose extremity the bases of the Catskills 'gin to rise. How impressive the westering sunshine, sifting itself down the mighty ravines and hollows, and tinting the far-off summits with aerial

³⁰Ellet, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 231).

³¹E. P. Oberholtzer, The Literary History of Philadelphia (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1969) Reprint of 1906 (first) edition, p. 301. Quoted in Dumas Malone and Allen Johnson (editors), Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), Vol. 4, p. 149.

light! How majestic yet soft the gradations from the ponderous grandeur of the formation; up, up to the giddy and delicate shadowings, which dimly veil and sanctify their tops, as 'sacristies of nature,' where the cedar rocks to the wind, and the screaming eagle snaps his mandibles, as he sweeps a circuit of miles with one full impulse of his glorious wing. 32

Clark takes care to distinguish between the short view and the long view. He suggests his preference for the latter by comparing the "roughness of the basis" with the "printed beauty of the iris-hued and skiey ultimatum." From this follows a curious warning.

Be not too eager, as you take the first stage of the mountain to look about you; especially, be not anxious to look afar. Now and then, it is true, as the coach turns, you cannot choose but see a landscape to the south and the east, farther off than you ever saw one before, broken up into a thousand vistas; but look you at them with a sleepy, sidelong eye, to the end that you finally receive from the Platform the full glory of the final view. In the meantime, there is enough directly about you to employ all your eyes, as if you had the ocular endowments of an Argus. 33

Clark's prose is more in the nature of a meditation than a visual detail. Biological information such as the species of trees and birds are pressed into servicing a mood or vision rather than describing immediate objects. Clark's vision was one shared to varying degrees by those who journeyed to Pine Orchard, though he seems to have had more facility in its expression than others. Clark continues his description of the short view.

³²Willis Gaylord Clark, Reprinted in Rockwell, op. cit., pp. 209-210.

³³Ibid., p. 210.

Huge rocks, that might have been sent from warring Titans, decked with moss, overhung with rugged shrubbery, and cooling the springs that trickle from beneath them, gloom beside the way; vast chasms, which your coach shall sometimes seem to overhang, yawn on the left, the pine and the cedar-scented air come freely and sweetly from the bosom of the woods, . . . while, with expanding nostril, you drink in the rarer and yet rarer air a stillness like the peace of Eden (broken only by the whisper of leaves, the faint chant of embowered birds, or the distant notes that come 'mellowed and mingling from the vale below'), hangs in the portal of your ear. It is time to be still, to be contemplative; to hear no voice but your own ejaculations, or those of one who will share and heighten your enjoyment, by partaking it in peace, and as one with you, yet alone.³⁴

Clark pushed "gaily on. . . with a flow of spirit" which he claimed was indescribable. Past Rip Van Winkle's "ravine," under a crag upon which sat the Mountain House, pressing on to the renowned "platform," the lookout east of the Mountain House. For Clark, the "fresh and pure" air assumed a "holy" aspect. "The lungs play. . . without effort; it is a luxury to breath. How holy was the stillness! Not a sound invaded the solemn air; it was like inhaling the sanctity of the empyrean."³⁵

At last the top, with its "commodious public house" situated on a platform of rock from which appeared a five-state view to the east and which was surrounded by a virtually unexplored wilderness to the north, west and south. The "view from the top" and Kaaterskill Falls, two

³⁴Ibid., pp. 210-211.

³⁵Ibid.

miles north of the House, became, after the opening of the Mountain House, the two principal scenic attractions on the Hudson River.

Of course, there were lesser known wilderness attractions in the "scenic domain of the Catskills."³⁶ That these did not have the romantic reputation of "the view" and Kaaterskill Falls in the first half of the century is partly explained by (1) the fact that they almost duplicated "the view" and (2) the difficulty of reaching them in an era when bushwacking was unfavorably regarded by persons whose status was partly determined by the delicacy of their dress. (After 1850, a network of paths was constructed so that people could more easily explore the "scenic domain" of the Mountain House.) Elizabeth Ellet suggests another reason why less famous sights were neglected.

Visitors at Catskill mountain usually do not give themselves time to see even what they do to the best advantage. Many of them remain but a single day, paying only a hurried visit to the falls, and neglecting many other scenes almost of equal interest. ³⁷

Two peaks dominated Pine Orchard, North and South Mountains. Ellet particularly enjoyed North Mountain, with its rich green mosses, dense underbrush, colorful wildflowers, lichen-covered rocks, and other details which

³⁶Chapter 5 (pp. 105ff) of Van Zandt, op. cit., has this title. Van Zandt focusses on tourist opportunities after mid-century, when rival hotels were built and the area was subject to increased development and commercialization by local entrepreneurs.

³⁷Ellet, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 237).

she knowingly suggested "might form study for the natural-ist."³⁸ As with other travellers, however, she did not climb North Mountain simply out of curiosity for its wilderness condition or for the invigorating exercise, but rather for the "splendid. . . .reward of the summit." She struggled up North Mountain with an almost unnatural diligence, the "promise of reward" serving as sufficient reason to ignore the difficulties in reaching the "promised good."

The panorama to the east of North Mountain was not unlike that from the "platform,"³⁹ the difference being that Pine Orchard itself was included in the picture. "Far, far below is the same extensive, billowy verdure -- the primitive forest." Perhaps her most singular impression was that she appeared to be above the clouds and "'mickle better off' than on the seeming plain, on which a fierce rain was evidently pouring." When the sun broke through the clouds, "the vapory veil beneath us was rent and rolled back; part of the landscape rejoiced once more in the living light."⁴⁰ While certainly the "clear blue of a summer's day" was prized, so too was the natural "spectacle" of massive, billowy clouds and thundershowers. They were "sublime beyond imagination."⁴¹

³⁸Ibid., p. 238.

³⁹See below, pages 17ff.

⁴⁰Ibid. While images of weather are peripheral to my principal concern in this study, A. T. Goodrich's summary description of atmospheric change is too interesting to ignore.

Not the least of the gratification derived by the observant person, or a lover of nature,

The "ascent up South Mountain was equally beautiful" to that up North Mountain. Yet in contrast, Ellet describes the path with even more detail -- uncharacteristic for someone of her romantic sensibilities. The path led through a "wild forest" of fir, cedar and silver pine interspersed with a great variety of deciduous trees and

from a visit to this mountain eyrie. . . . are the changes in the atmosphere, produced by clouds, fogs, thunderstorms, and the charming and sublime shadows and lights passing rapidly over the plain; also the appearances produced by the early morning sun, or evening twilight, or the softer radiance of full moon, or by the clearing off and rising of the morning mist from the plains below; or what is still better, to be so fortunate as to witness the gathering of a heavy thunderstorm, and to see the lowering volumes of dark vapours come sweeping over the western crest of a mountain, bringing in its train the forked lightning, the loud thunder, and the pelting hail, shaking the firm foundations, and reverberating among the echoes of the everlasting hills; and then to see, as the winter has done, the surcharged clouds subsiding and sinking into the valley, and then again to see the bright flash, and hear the roar of the storm that is raging beneath your feet, while over your zenith, all is clear and calm as a morning sun, and you see beyond the range of the storm, at ten, twenty, or forty miles distance, the clear powerful rays of the sun pouring with unmitigated intensity upon a tract parched with draught; and then to finish and grace the scene, as the atmosphere is clearing away, pillars of rainbow hues are seen in the east on the face of the retreating cloud and all is hushed, and the refreshed face of nature once more assumes its wonted appearance. A traveller in Europe present at the time, acknowledged that a scene equal to that in sublimity had only once gratified him, -- Mont Blanc at sunset. (A. T. Goodrich, The North American Tourist (New York: A. T. Goodrich, 1839), p. 39.)

"so much more beautiful than the southern pine." There were also "huge boulders. . . .piled around," Once again, she was impressed by the mosses and the lichens, as well as the apparently soil-less environment of the trees and the precarious balance of most rocks.⁴² It is clear that she had more time than most to enjoy these two mountains.

North and South Mountains were insignificant compared to the two sights which, besides the artificial attraction of the Mountain House, unleashed the romantic enthusiasm for Pine Orchard by American and foreign visitors. Since these two sights were quite different and somewhat unique, I shall examine each in some detail.

The "prospect" to the east of the platform "embraced a greater extent and more diversity of scenery than is to be found in any other part of the state, or perhaps in the United States."⁴³ On a clear day, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and of course New York were part of the most famous romantic view in America.

A seemingly endless succession of woods and waters, farms and villages, towns and cities, are spread out as if on an endless map. Far in the east rise the Taghkanic Mountains, and the heights of Connecticut and Massachusetts. To the left, and at a still greater distance, the Green Mountains of Vermont stretch away to the north, and their blue summits and the blue sky mingle together. The beautiful Hudson, studded

⁴²Ellet, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 240).

⁴³Davison, op. cit., p. 140.

with islands, appears narrowed in the distance with steamboats almost constantly in sight; while vessels of every description spreading their white canvas to the breeze, are moving rapidly over its surface, or idly loitering in the calm. These may be traced to a distance of nearly seventy miles with the naked eye. 44

Willis Gaylord Clark's unbridled enthusiasm for the journey to Pine Orchard by stage and foot⁴⁵ was clearly designed to prepare readers for the top. In concluding his tale of that journey, Clark "attained

hill after hill, mere ridges of the mountainsummit after summit surmounted. . . . Finally it appeared, and a-nigh; to me the 'earth's one sanctuary.' I reached it; and stood on the Platform.

Good Reader! expect me not to describe the indescribable. 46

Typically, Clark begins his description of the view from Pine Orchard by denying the very possibility of doing what he had every intention of doing. His hesitation to record what he saw derived from a belief that since the landscape of the Hudson Valley and beyond was a divine creation, it was only partly perceivable and understandable by human beings. Clark's initial expression of awe simply reflected

⁴⁴ John Disturnell (compiler), The Traveller's Guide to the Hudson River, Saratoga Springs, Lake George, the Falls of Niagara and Thousand Islands; Montreal, Quebec, and the Saguenay River; also to the Green and White Mountains, and other parts of New England; Forming the Fashionable Northern Tour Through the United States and Canada with Maps and Embellishments (New York: Published by the American News Company, 1864), p. 39. This edition is almost an exact reproduction of the 1858 edition entitled The Picturesque Tourist.

⁴⁵ See pages 183-185.

⁴⁶ Clark, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 212).

The theological necessity of recognizing human limitation in the face of divine omnipotence. Although this has now become secularized for commercial benefit, so that entrepreneurs prey upon the "indescribability" of scenic locations in hopes of luring tourists to see for themselves, early tourists to Pine Orchard were not subject to such advertisements. Clark's reluctance to describe the view from Pine Orchard was characteristic of his age. It was a genuine attempt to indicate a limited comprehension of something which he believed, both experientially and theologically, to be finally incomprehensible to human beings.

Other than the particular internal subjectivity each viewer brought to the scene, no factor was more important to the images of the "view from the top" than the time of day.⁴⁷ A favorite time for "taking in" the

⁴⁷ Weather conditions were less important (see footnote 41) and seasonal variations played a significant role only after the Civil War. During the first years of operation, the Mountain House was open to visitors from the late spring thru the early autumn. Before the Civil War, Thomas Cole (1801-1848) was the principal maker of Catskillian winter images. He published several poems and essays about seasonal variations in the Catskills and particularly about Kaaterskill Falls. I should note, however, that Cole was a resident of Catskill, New York, not a tourist. As such, his images are outside the purview of this study. The only reference to a pre-Civil War spring on the Hudson River that I have discovered is from William Darby, who on May 3, 1818, wrote that no scenery can exhibit a more dreary aspect than that of the Hudson; naked rocks or precipices, with a few leafless forest trees, are the only objects that in many places meet the eye of the voyager in passing many miles upon this truly singular river. While the cold damp wind sweeps

along the current, the view of the distant farm houses have a solitary and even gloomy appearance. Perhaps in no equal distance on earth, is the contrast between the smiles of summer and the frowns of winter so strong as upon the Hudson banks between New-York and Albany. (William Darby, A Tour From the City of New York, to Detroit (Chicago: Quadrangle Books American Classic Series, 1962), p. 9. This volume was originally published in 1819. The tour went from May 2, 1818 through September 22, 1818.)

On the other hand, autumn was valued for all its color, though the "American autumn" was not promoted as a "natural wonder" in its own right until after the Civil War. While we may wish to speculate about "Time and the American Experience" and other abstractions in a search for why this was the case, clearly a principal reason was such a mundane factor as the weather. People were not prepared for the cold on open boat decks and carriages, and if pleasure travelling could be done during the summer, that was preferred.

Nevertheless, some intrepid travellers travelled during the autumn. Isaac Holmes, an Englishman who visited Pine Orchard in the year the Mountain House was erected, reported that

The Prospects from the Catskill Mountains on the Hudson or North River, is well entitled to the appellation of bold and magnificent. The appearance of the whole country in autumn may be said to be enchanting. The walnut-tree, then a bright yellow; the maple a scarlet; many others take a deep copper color: the scenery of the forests at this time with their rich and golden tints, cannot be properly or adequately described. (Isaac Holmes, An Account of the United States of America, Derived from Actual Observation, During a Residence of Four Years In That Republic: Including Original Communications (London: Caxton Press, 1823), p. 428.

John Duncan, a Scot, travelled during the same year as William Darby. He must have visited Pine Orchard during Indian Summer.

The mellowing tints of autumn were now spreading themselves among the forest leaves, imparting to the scenery the richness and variety which are peculiar to the season, and as our steamboat ploughed its way along, the eye feasted itself in the ever-varying landscape, or rested on the brilliant reflection in the placid mirror below. (John Duncan, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 317.)

panorama was during sunrise and early morning. Clark did not even get out of bed.

You can lie on your pillow at the Kaatskill House, and see the god of day look upon you from behind the pinnacles of the White Mountains in New Hampshire, hundreds of miles away. Noble prospect! As the rising orb heaves up in ineffable grandeur, he seems rising from beneath you, and you fancy that you have attained an elevation where may be seen the motion of the world. No intervening land to limit the view, you seem suspended in mid-air, without one obstacle to check the eye. The scene is 48
indescribable.

In the early morning, clouds often hung so low that a morning view characteristically included the dispersal of a cloud cover. Cobden witnessed such a scene, describing it in almost cosmic dimensions.

On rising, have a fine view of the clouds as they are rolling in fleecy masses below the mountain. It's a struggle of the god of day with the vapors of morning -- now gathering up the folds of mist as if to leave the whole landscape below in the light of the morning sun, and then again spreading its shadowy mantle over all -- or occasionally breaking asunder it disclosed a glimpse of the beautiful vale and then once more closing the fissure and piling thicker and thicker its folds of vapor till it seemed like a sea of foam spreading from our feet out into the 49
interminable distance.

Despite these two autumn descriptions, off-season pleasure travelling to the Catskills was unusual until after the Civil War.

⁴⁸Clark, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 214).

⁴⁹Richard Cobden, The American Diaries of Richard Cobden (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952), Edited, with an Introduction and notes by Elizabeth Hoon Cawley, pp. 123-4. Cobden travelled in the United States during 1835 and 1859. The quotation is from the 1835 diary.

This image of unfolding, of the clouds unpredictably opening and closing the broader scene to human viewing caused Davison to observe that the sunrise "assumes rather the appearance of enchantment than reality."⁵⁰

Enchantment was no substitute for reality if the day remained overcast, for then the scenery was "less grand and beautiful." Ideally, the clouds that "hung low" were burned off by the morning sun. When the cloud cover rose, Benjamin Dorr had a chance to see the valley. He continued with subdued enthusiasm.

the height of the mountain is so great as to diminish the objects below and render many of them too indistinct. You see, indeed, 'all creation' as Leatherstocking says, but it is in miniature. The River appears like a small-winding stream, and the Sloops and Steamboats like so many Cockboats floating on its tranquil bosom. The whole country below appears like one vast plain, without hill or valley, and has been coarsely compared to a quilt of patchwork, owing to the numberless farms divided into woodland, pasture, and meadow, which present every variety of form and tint and size. Altogether, however, the scene is uncommonly sublime and picturesque. 51

Bruce's aesthetic typology of the Hudson River conflicts with Dorr's image of the view from Pine Orchard, for that view would be "beautiful" rather than, as Dorr reports, "uncommonly sublime and picturesque." On the Hudson, sublimity implied terror or threat; the picturesque characteristically reflected a stark contrast, either natural or superficial, between elements of the landscape. Dorr

⁵⁰Davison, op. cit., p. 140.

⁵¹Dorr, op. cit., p. 49.

emphasizes neither terror nor contrast in his description, simply observing that the objects were "indistinct" and that the view "appears like one vast plain, without hill or valley" through which runs a "tranquil" stream. Dorr's description cautions us against applying any rigid American meaning to the categories of the sublime, the picturesque and the beautiful. These terms suggest widely held sensibilities; they do not lend themselves to fixed definition.

William Leete Stone, whose reflections on the road up the mountain we have already noted,⁵² suggests further reason for caution. Stone uses his impressions from Pine Orchard to exemplify the theories of Edmund Burke.

Burke remarks that height has less grandeur than depth, and that we are more struck at looking down from a precipice than in looking up to an object of equal height. The correctness of this opinion will not be questioned by those who from below have looked up at the hotel almost without emotion, and who again have looked down from those shelving cliffs with giddy heads and trembling, breathless interest. No one mounts a towering eminence but feels his soul elevated; the whole frame acquires unwonted elasticity, and the spirits flow as it were in one aspiring stream of satisfaction and delight: for what can be more animating than from one spot to behold the pomp of man and the pride of nature lying at our feet? Who can refrain from being charmed?

53

Stone then tells a story about a "thunder-gust" at Pine Orchard. In the Hudson Valley, we associated the sublime with the immediate or perceived danger of (1) an

⁵²See page 178.

⁵³Stone, (Rockwell, op. cit., pp. 174-5).

overpowering mass of water or rock as in the Highlands and (2) a sudden thunderstorm on the Tappan Sea. Similarly, there was a certain sublimity in "running upon the brink of a deep ravine, or beneath frowning precipices" on the road to Pine Orchard, for guidebooks invariably warned readers that such experiences "excited an unwelcome degree of terror" implying that their safety was in jeopardy.⁵⁴ Stone broadens the concept of sublimity. The combination of lightning, thunder, rain and the secure heightened position of the observer at Pine Orchard made the scene a "specacle sublime beyond expression, with no feeling of terror or of fear of injury."⁵⁵ Again, "sublime" had no specific definition in American usage.

Stone concludes his description of the view from Pine Orchard with a paragraph which anticipates the spiritual flavor of Harriet Martineau's iconology, except that Stone focusses on anthropology rather than epistemology.

Viewing from above the wide expanse of country below, under the bright sunlight of Heaven, where things large and grand look in the distance, so great and small, one is led wisely to reflect on the insignificance and the vain and trifling pursuits of man. If to us, thus raised but a little above those around us, man's possessions and labors seem so small, how must the saint in Heaven look down upon human toils and cares and greatness, here on this little globe of earth so far beneath Him! 56

⁵⁴Gordon's Gazette, (Barber and Howe, op. cit., p. 184).

⁵⁵Stone, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 176).

⁵⁶Ibid.

A most interesting description of the view from the top is that of Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), the illustrious Unitarian Englishwoman who was probably best known in the United States for her abolitionist views on slavery. Martineau's prose is rich in its descriptive power, the number of central aesthetic issues it highlights, and its spiritual flavor.

It was Sunday morning. After a curious remark about the way in which one not trained to see beauty in anything but clear blue sky might react to a dense fog cover at eye level, Martineau continues.

This solid firmament [fog] had spaces in it, however, through which gushes of sunlight were poured, lighting up the spires of white churches, and clusters of farm buildings too small to be otherwise distinguished; and especially the river with its sloops, floating like motes in the sunbeam.

Her image is strongly reminiscent of Genesis 1:3-5. Light conquers darkness. She develops this mood further.

The firmament rose and melted; or parted off into the likeness of snowy sky-mountains, and left the cool Sabbath to brood lightly over the land. What human interest sanctifies the bird's eye view! I support this is its peculiar charm. 57

Martineau has set the stage for one of the most interesting discussions of the role of human presuppositions and perspectives in viewing "natural wonders" in

⁵⁷Harriet Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel in Two Volumes (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), Vol. I, p. 86. These volumes were first published in London in 1838.

all of nineteenth century travel literature. That landscapes are present and available for any who would open their eyes was (and still is) a common assumption among travellers. Martineau speaks directly to this assumption in observing that what people see is not only a function of the geophysical landscape, but also of the aesthetic and/or religious perspectives which persons bring to the scene. In her words, "charm is found to deepen in proportion to the growth of the mind." It was a point made in different ways by both Romantics who saw worlds in flowers and devoted Common Sense Realists whose use of association psychology expanded the meaning of the landscape beyond its immediate physicality. While we may not agree with Martineau's linear model, clearly she is on the edge of an important observation.

To an infant, a champaign of a hundred miles is not so much as yard square of gay carpet. To the rustic, it is less bewitching than a paddock with two cows. To the philosopher, what is it not? As he casts his eye over its glittering towns, its scattered hamlets, its secluded homes, its mountain ranges, church spires, and untrodden forests, it is a picture of life; an epitome of the human universe; the complete volume of moral philosophy for which he has sought in vain in all libraries. 58

Presumably, Martineau identified herself as a philosopher. Given her theological and social ideas, we should not be surprised that she skillfully used her experience at Pine Orchard to challenge the prevailing

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 86-7.

Scottish categorization of experience and reality by declining to make the epistemological, aesthetic or moral distinctions commonly accepted in her day. Rather, the view from Pine Orchard was evidence of the underlying unity and common inheritance of all life. Martineau challenges the Scottish implication of an aesthetic hierarchy. She uses the language of immanence.

There, where the blue expanse lies beyond the triple range of hills, are the churches of religious Massachusetts, sending up their Sabbath psalms, -- praise which he [the philosopher at Pine Orchard] is too high to hear, while God is not.

The legal system is also challenged.

The fields and waters seem to him [the philosopher] to-day [sic] no more truly property than the skies which shine down upon them. . . . It seems strange to him now that man should call anything his but the power which is in him, and which can create somewhat more vast and beautiful than all that this horizon encloses. 59

Martineau uses these reflections as the basis for a direct confrontation with the prevailing Common Sense epistemology and identifies her philosophical stance with that of George Berkeley. In contrast to Berkeley's insistence that nothing is independent of mind, and that there is no reality outside of perception, Scottish Common Sense philosophers had insisted that only the observable world, with all its existing hierarchical components, constituted reality. Mental constraints were regarded suspiciously

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 87.

by a Scottish elite anxious to ward off the idealist dreams of those who might tamper with the status quo. Archibald Alison modified the Scottish stance somewhat by insisting that reality can be known only through the operation of mind and not directly from sense impressions. However, Alison restricted the mind's operation on sense impressions to the process of association, itself a limitation inasmuch as the proper associations were themselves defined according to tradition. While the mind was not ignored by some Scottish thinkers, it was limited to a predictable process.

For Martineau, Scottish notions of reality indicated a meagre spiritual life. In contrast, the true philosopher at Pine Orchard gains

the conviction, to be never shaken again, that all that is real is ideal; that the joys and sorrows of men do not spring up out of the ground, or fly abroad on the wings of the wind, or come showered down from the sky; that good cannot be hedged in, nor evil barred out; even that light does not reach the spirit through the eye alone, nor wisdom through the medium of sound or silence only. He becomes one with the mind of the spiritual Berkeley, that the face of nature itself, the very picture of woods and streams and meadows, is a hieroglyphic writing of the spirit itself, of which the retina is no interpreter. The proof is just below him, (at least it came under my eye,) in the lady (not American) who, after glancing over the landscape brings her chair to the piazza, and turning her back to the champaign, and her face to the wooden walls of the hotel, begins the study, this Sunday morning, of her lapful of newspapers. What a sermon is thus preached to him at this moment, from a very hackneyed text! To him that hath much, --

that hath the eye and ear and wealth of the spirit, shall more be given, -- even a replenishing of this spiritual life from that which to others is formless and dumb: while from him that hath little, who trusts in that which lies about him rather than in that which lies within him, shall be taken away, be natural decline, the power of perceiving and enjoying what is within his own domain. To him who is already enriched with large divine and human revelations, this scene is, for all its stillness, musical with divine and human speech: while one who has been deafened by the din of worldly affairs can 60 hear nothing in this mountain solitude.

Perhaps she thinks that the newspaper-reading lady was a conservative Scot who absorbed the social and political realities of the day more easily than the extensive mind-expanding view to her back.

The following morning was too grand for description. Martineau follows her own advice, unlike other travellers, and does not pretend to describe the indescribable, giving as her rationale that she would not "weary others with what is most sacred to me." She simply notes, as she had the day before, that the scene gave her

a vivid idea of the process of creation, from the moment when all was without form and void, to that when light was commanded 61 and there was light.

As the morning sun rose higher in the east (the view itself was due east), similar impressions were recorded by other visitors. Joseph J. Gurney, an "evangelical Friend" who visited the United States around 1840

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 88.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 89.

for the purpose of visiting the "meetings of the Society of Friends and. . .preaching the Gospel of Christ," compared the view to a map. He found the scenery "magnificent" and "as stimulating to the mind as the cool bracing air is to the body." Later he gives a more direct indication of what he had in mind. "The glorious scenes we had been viewing, had been preaching us a sermon louder and more impressive than the most eloquent discourses of men."⁶² From the tone of his writing, it would appear that Gurney was as stimulated by the "view from the top" as Martineau.

Others were less stimulated. While Martineau had been confirmed and bolstered in her belief that the "real is ideal," C. D. Arfwedson was spiritually confused by the scene. He feared losing the image and expressed a reluctance to return to the mundane realities of daily life. In a word, he cherished the soothing luxury of contemplation over the tiring world of action.

The sun at last had sufficient power to dissipate these cloudy landscapes, and gave me an opportunity of beholding, not an imaginary but a most extensive and enchanting view. No sudden change of stage scenery or magic metamorphosis has ever produced a similar effect upon me as the one I now experienced. I could hardly believe my eyes. I was absolutely struck with astonishment: every one present seemed to feel the same impulse. In deep meditation, we all contemplated beautiful Nature, hardly venturing to raise our eyes for fear of destroying

⁶²Joseph John Gurney, A Journey in North America Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie (Norwich, England: Printed for Private Circulation by Joseph Fletcher, 1841), pp. 290-91.

the illusion. It was too fine a sight to be lost of; I dreaded the next minute would make it disappear like a vapour, as quickly as it had presented itself to my view. 63

Arwedson reflects another influence of the natural world on American life and culture. The contemplative mode, an "impulse" which "everyone present seemed to feel," was never a majority strain in Protestant America. Yet despite its association with Roman Catholic mysticism, it remained a temptation and an enchantment to those Americans and Europeans who missed "meditation" in their particular version of institutionalized Christianity. Perhaps even more important were the feelings of those who did not directly identify with a Protestant denomination (a considerable percentage of the population) but who nevertheless were unavoidably infected by the aura of Calvinist and neo-Calvinist sensibilities in American culture. Arwedson reflects a feeling of subdued yearning for spiritual freedom. This is something we shall encounter with increasing frequency as we travel north and west. Just as Timothy Dwight's latent romanticism was only released from its topographical prison by a "natural wonder," so too were the sentiments of other travellers released. Nevertheless, reserve characterized most expressions of enthusiasm at Pine Orchard. Explosions of wonder were being saved for Niagara Falls.

"At noonday, under cloudless sky, the picture [was]

⁶³Arwedson, op. cit., p. 70.

rather monotonous" for such a seasoned traveller as Bayard Taylor.⁶⁴ In comparison to the "grand aerial depth" of the morning and evening shadows, mid-day was both the most predictable and least interesting time for Taylor and his fellow sophisticated travellers. Yet in the interest of mass appeal, professional guides who presented Pine Orchard to amateur aesthetes on their jaunts to and around the increasingly famous mountain mecca, described Pine Orchard from the perspective of the least controversial and best known time of day. Writers of guidebooks minimized such factors as the time and day and weather conditions in favor of the basic view, the most obvious scenic features, and the most generally acceptable image.

Goodrich's North American Tourist (1839) is a representative guidebook, at least with respect to Pine Orchard in the 1830's.⁶⁵ Goodrich emphasized contrast, for even at mid-day, the deepest cloves in the valley below Pine Orchard were dark green compared to the sun-drenched fields. Because he uses a familiar keystone of Anglo-American aesthetics only in reference to the "volume of nature," we are left with the impression that for Goodrich contrast and volume were the important features of the "view from the top." Goodrich describes

diversified colors of the cleared and
cultivated lands, green lots, and the

⁶⁴Taylor, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 255).

⁶⁵Goodrich, op. cit.

yellow harvest ripening for the sickle and the scythe, with all the hues of the fading distance, and the deep and full green of the American forest predominating over the landscape, the whole presented at such an angle and as distinctly exhibited in its details, as a map, or page, in the sublime volume of nature.

The entire view, from the twilight dimness of objects in the gorge, and the concentration of the eager gaze of the beholder, and the brilliant lighting up of the remoted squares and divisions of the farms, dwindled into diminutive size at the end of the grand gallery of nature, seems of itself to be a perfect picture, set with a gigantic and appropriate frame, and underneath the blue canopy of the o'er-arching expanse of heaven, is in admirable keeping and harmony. 66

Nelson's Illustrated Guide to the Hudson is significantly different. Published in 1860, twenty-one years after Goodrich's guide, it is characterized by a greater romanticism, a lyrical quality, and the association of the land with the War of Independence, making Nelson's image seem a prose version of Samuel Francis Smith's hymn, America.⁶⁷ Even the language echoes the earlier hymn.

Standing on the sheer verge of this precipice, there is spread out beneath you a landscape of almost unequalled extent and beauty. . . . Beneath you a perfect sea of woods heaves its billowy mass -- beyond, the mighty Hudson, dwindled to a rill, winds through the valley -- in front a rich prospect of forest, field and town, ends in the swelling uplands which rise to mountains piled upon mountains, 'til the last and loftiest fades into the blue of the sky -- far on the left glitter the green hills of Vermont -- while on the right the grand Atlantic sparkles. Perched thus in mid-air,

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

⁶⁷ See chapter 1, pp. 1-2.

level with the rolling clouds, that cast
 their fitful shadows on the glorious
 landscape beneath, the heart of each
 free-born American must be stirred with
 gratitude to Heaven for making earth so
 fair -- and to his heroic forefathers,
 who so freely spilled their blood to
 secure him that freedom which blesses
 these fair scenes -- and with somewhat,
 too, of that chivalrous feeling which
 gushes from those living lines of Scott --

Where's the coward who would not dare 68
 To fight for such a land?

The contrast of city and country provided the context for observations by at least two other visitors -- Nathaniel Parker Willis and Park Benjamin. "No place is so agreeable as Catskill, after one has been parboiled in the city."⁶⁹ Not known for his deeply felt religious sentiments -- rather better known as the model of a fashionable tourist -- Willis at least employed the fashionable aesthetic terminology. The "busy and all-glorious Hudson" from the Mountain House was a "constant diorama of the most heavenly beauty." But it was not enough to keep Willis from complaining. This devotee of the fashionable resort, committed to the conveniences of resort living and marginally appreciative of the untamed wilderness, criticized the pastoral development of the Hudson River Valley. While Goodrich rejoiced that the "deep and full gloom of the American forest" was

⁶⁸ _____, Nelson's Illustrated Guide to the Hudson and Its Tributaries (New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1860), pp. 105-106. Nelson quotes Sir Walter Scott's six Canto poem Marmion, Canto IV, Stanza 30.

⁶⁹ Willis, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 219).

"predominant" over the view from Pine Orchard, Willis complained of overdevelopment, once again confirming the rich diversity of fashionable imagery during the period.

Harriet Martineau used her wilderness images for spiritual ends and gloried in God's creation, while Willis, who was more concerned with his status in society, suggested that the scene had seen too much of man. An Englishwoman, whose own country was bursting with people, marvels at the comparative wilderness of America, yet Willis, an American, dismisses Pine Orchard and the Hudson River view with the remark that it is not rural enough!

A smaller and less-frequented stream would best fulfill desires born of a sigh. There is either no seclusion on the Hudson, or there is so much that the conveniences of life are difficult to obtain. Where the steamers come ashore (twenty a day, with each from one to seven hundred passengers), it is certainly far from secluded enough. No place can be rural, in all the virtues of the phrase, where the steamer will take the villager to the city between noon and night, and bring him back between midnight and morning. There is a suburban look and character about all the villages on the Hudson which seems out of place among such scenery. They are suburbs, in fact; steam has destroyed the distance between them and the city. 70

Park Benjamin (1809-1864), caustic literary critic, sometime editor associated with Charles Fenno Hoffman and Horace Greeley, and controversial poet renowned for a sensational style, also couched his images of Pine Orchard in terms of the contrast between civilization and

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 220.

wilderness. In July 1843, he wrote,

'Tis pleasant, for a while to leave the heated pavements and the garbaged atmosphere of our everbustling, noisy city, to bid adieu to the continued rumbling and rattling of all the various vehicles that the worried horses are destined to drag in merciless labor to and fro the cities length; to shun the charcoal vendors unearthly guttural; the cries of the newspaper urchins, more varied in tone than the gamut's self; to flee from patients, clients, patrons, and all the constant, ever-varying avocations, that tend to harass and perplex oneself upon some mountainous elevation, where nature's calmness changes the current of our thoughts, and turns them from the real and artificial miseries of humanity. On such a spot, we can enjoy an inward elevation, partaking of the beauty and serenity of the scene, and indulge the mind in instructive reflections upon the past, the present and the future.

More important was the moral lesson that Park Benjamin attached to such a view.

It would seem that the Great Creator of the universe had built up the mighty eminence that man might know His power, and feeling his own insignificance, despise and shun the vanities and hollow-heartedness of life. Here the belief is taught that there is but one religion and one great family of mankind. . . . Attempt not to give utterance to your feelings -- language could not express 71 them.

The "quarter of an hour before sunset [was] perhaps the best moment of the day for the Catskill panorama."⁷² What impressed no less an authority than Bayard Taylor were the shadows which "strode westward at the rate of a league a minute" but also had the effect of changing the color of

⁷¹Park Benjamin, Quoted in Rockwell, op. cit., p. 221.

⁷²Taylor, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 254).

the landscape. Harriet Martineau observed practically the same phenomenon. On returning from a day trip to Kaaterskill Falls, she was back at her window

watching the gradual lengthening of the shadows and the purpling of the landscape. It was more beautiful than the sunrise of this morning.⁷³

Willis Gaylord Clark, who warned his readers not to expect him to "describe the indescribable,"⁷⁴ was similarly overwhelmed by the late afternoon view.

I leaned upon my staff before that omnipotent picture, and looked abroad upon its GOD-written magnitude. It was a vast and changeful, a majestic, an interminable landscape; a fairy, grand, and deliciously-colored scene, with rivers for the lines of reflections; with highlands and the vales of States for its shadowings, and far-off mountains for its frame. Those parti-colored and varying clouds I fancied I had seen as I ascended, were but portions of the scene. All colors of the rainbow; all softness of harvest-field, and forest, and distant cities, and the towns that simply dotted the Hudson; and far beyond where that noble river, diminished to a brooklet, rolled its waters, there opened mountain after mountain, vale after vale, State after State, heaved up against the horizon, to the north-east and south, in impressive and sublime confusion; while still beyond, in undulating ridges, filled with all hues of light and shade, coquetting with the cloud, rolled the rock-ribbed, and ancient frame of this dim diorama!⁷⁵

The sun sets. Of his view, American William Darby wrote with simple affection and without layers of familiar

⁷³Martineau, (Rockwell, op. cit., pp. 212-3).

⁷⁴See page 188.

⁷⁵Clark, (Rockwell, op. cit., pp. 212-13).

aesthetic terminology. Darby is more direct, less associative, but in an unaffected way, equally effective in his expression. "Never before" had he seen

that luminary take his nightly leave of man with more serene majesty, or amid so many objects to heighten the beauty of the scene. . . .I watched the departure of the king of day; the slow and silent advance of darkness, at length shrouded in gloom a picture, whose tints [sic] can only be forgotten when my bosom ceases to beat. Environed by the mossy and sublime monuments, reared by the hands of nature, and enjoying the softened beauty of such an evening, I could not repress a retrospection on the march of time. 76

The other major wilderness attraction at Pine Orchard was Kaaterskill Falls (Cauterskill Falls), a 260 foot cataract (making it slightly higher than Niagara Falls) in two sections of approximately 175 and 85 feet respectively. Kaaterskill Falls fell into a deep gorge with walls which, by amplifying sounds and exaggerating depths, added to the impression of sublime terror. The compiler of Gordon's Gazetteer even asserted that the "falls, with all its boldness, forms, however, but one of the interesting features of this scene," indicating that the immediate environment of the Falls contributed to the total experience.

The current is lost in a deep ravine or clove through which it seeks the valley of the Catskill. . . .From the edge of the first falls is beheld a dreary chasm, whose steep sides, covered with dark ivy and thick summer foliage, seem like a

⁷⁶Darby, op. cit., p. 12.

green bed prepared for the waters.
 Making a circuit from this spot, and
 descending about midway of the first fall,
 the spectator enters an immense amphitheatre
 behind the cascade, roofed by a magnificent
 ceiling of rock, having in front the
 falling torrent, and behind it the wild
 mountain dell, over which the clear blue
 sky is visible. 77

With Niagara Falls the principal water wonder of
 the western world, Americans increasingly revered water-
 falls as the most remarkable examples of sublime terror
 and majesty. Waterfalls also became a source of national-
 istic pride -- exemplifying the power and vitality of the
 new nation.⁷⁸ In the hierarchy of waterfalls, Kaaterskill
 Falls had a varied reputation. On the one hand, the fact
 that it was higher than Niagara Falls was well noted.
 On the other hand, the volume of water in Kaaterskill
 Creek was just a trickle compared to that in the Niagara
 River, so much so that later in the century, some enter-
 prising Yankees from a town below, rigged up a dam to

economize the limited supply of water,
 and thus enable the falls always to look
 at their best. . . .the falls is turned
on to accommodate poets and parties of
 pleasure. . . .so much for the method of
 doing it now-a-days, when nature and
 poetry have chiefly but a theoretical
 value, and natural scenes are particu-
 larly apt to be regarded as shop windows
 on a grandeur scale. 79

⁷⁷Gordon's Gazette, (Barber and Howe, op. cit., pp. 185-6).

⁷⁸Further study on the image and place of waterfalls in
 American culture would be a significant contribution to
 American religious and intellectual history.

⁷⁹Nelson's Illustrated Guide, op. cit., pp. 111-112.

Early in the century, this ingenious dam arrangement was just a dream. After its construction, nostalgia for the less commercialized days of yore was minimal except for an occasional romantic.⁸⁰

There seems to have been some controversy over the value of the Falls itself in the early years of the century. For obvious reasons, those who had a stake in the success of the Mountain House were anxious to promote every item of romantic scenery within the domain of the House. Certainly the Falls' height was such an item, although in terms of volume of water, it was no match for the water wonder further west. The guidebooks reflect an entrepreneurial bias. When listing the River Kaaterskill in the first pages of a Gazetteer, its compiler notes that

On this stream, near the Mountain House, on Pine Orchard, are a succession of beautiful and romantic waterfalls; the water first falls perpendicularly 175

⁸⁰ Bayard Taylor, somewhat more critical of American scenery than many tourists, reported that

the damming up of the water, so much deprecated by the romantics, strikes me as an admirable arrangement. When the dam is full the stream overruns it, and you have as much water as if there were no dam. Then, as you stand at the head of the lower fall, watching the slender scarf of silver rush from the summit; the fall leaps away, from the half-way ledge where it lingered, bursting in rockets and shooting stars of spray on the rocks, and you have the full effect of the stream when swollen by spring thaws. Really, this temporary increase of volume is the finest feature of the fall. (Bayard Taylor, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 257).

feet, then pausing momentarily, upon the ledge of rock, precipitate themselves 85 feet more. . . .From this point, the water rushes into a dark ravine. 81

Later, on considering the location of Pine Orchard itself, the same compiler mentions the waterfalls as of the "most wild and romantic character," which, with the view from the top, form "unrivalled attractions."⁸²

Two guidebook authors take a different approach. Rather than themselves describing the Falls, they employ the authority of others to provide an endearing image of praise. H. D. Gilpin quotes a long passage from James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales, a conversation between Leatherstocking and Natty Bumpo in which the Cauterskill Falls are described.⁸³ Cooper obviously cherishes the Cauterskill Falls, and Gilpin hoped that Cooper's enthusiasm would infect his readers. A. T. Goodrich, using a similar method, appeals to the images of a landscape painter rather than an author in the "pictorial mode."⁸⁴

Besides the view from the Table Rock [Platform]. . . .there are other inducements for traveller's disposed for a time to seek out gratification and amusement, to visit the Falls and other

⁸¹ A Gazetteer of the State of New York, published by John Disturnell, Ibid., p. 219.

⁸² Ibid., p. 324.

⁸³ Gilpin, op. cit., pp. 40=43.

⁸⁴ See Donald A. Ringe, The Pictorial Mode: Space and Time in the Art of Bryant, Irving and Cooper (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1971).

spots that the magic touches of Cole the artist have brought to the public attention and admiration. 85

William Cullen Bryant, whose poem entitled "Cauterskill Falls" (1836) is not so much a descriptive verse as it was the evocation of a mood, was often referred to in guidebooks as a "lover of the features" of Cauterskill Falls. By referring to Cooper, Cole and Bryant, guidebook writers at least made the sophisticated public aware of the favor which the Falls were held by respected cultural leaders and probably increased the number of visitors to the Falls. At the same time, we must remember that those responsible for the tourist trade -- entrepreneurs, transportation owners, guidebook writers and publishers -- were using these enthusiastic pictorial reports by Cooper, Cole and Bryant for their own commercial aggrandizement.

They did not convince everybody. Those who had seen Niagara Falls were often disappointed. Arfwedson

85 Goodrich, op. cit., p. 34. Thomas Cole painted the Kaaterskill Falls several times -- in 1825 (The Falls of Catskill, New York, now in the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut and entitled "Cascade in Catskill Mountains"), in 1826 ("From the Top of Kaaterskill Falls," now in the Detroit Institute of Arts), and the now famous waterfall picture, the 1827 "Kaaterskill Falls," originally owned by William Cullen Bryant and now in a private collection. Cole was the first in a flood of artists who painted these falls and made them one of the best known in the east. Particularly important artists who followed Cole's example were W. G. Wall, Henry Bartlett, Henry Fenn, Currier and Ives, Fritz Meyer, E. Heinmann, Frederick E. Church, Jasper Cropsey, Jervis McEntee and S. R. Gifford. There were others as well. A study of the iconography and iconology of Cauterskill Falls from the artists' point of view would be a valuable contribution to the study of American landscape painting.

visited Cauterskill more out of duty than desire, bowing to the general affection for cataracts in these early heady days of American romanticism.

Although told in New York that these waterfalls are very insignificant, and hardly worth seeing, particularly in a state in which Niagara is situated, I nevertheless determined to visit them, conceiving there is nothing in nature so fine, so magnificent, and majestic, as a cataract. 86

Arfwedson does not say whether the Falls were to his liking or not, but I suspect that his silence indicates his lack of enthusiasm.

Harriet Martineau also dismisses the Falls by her silence. After so much descriptive prose about the view from the top, she says nothing about Cauterskill Falls. She did visit them, but "grieved to have to leave my window for an expedition [by coach] to the Falls, a few miles off." Her report is curious.

The Falls are really very fine, -- or rather their environment; but nowhere else such a mountain platform. However the expedition was a good preparation for the return to my window. The little nooks of the road, crowded with berries, cherries and alpine flowers, and the quiet tarn, studded with golden waterlilies, were a wholesome contrast to the grandeur of what we had left behind us. 87

Despite these decidedly lukewarm expressions of affection for the second most important attraction of Pine

⁸⁶Arfwedson, op. cit., p. 71.

⁸⁷Martineau, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 89.

Orchard, there were more positive expressions. Benjamin Dorr, who had criticized the Mountain House as "inappropriate" for its environment, continues to express opinions which seem to be in the minority. Perhaps his enthusiasm for Cauterskill Falls is partly explained by the probability that he had not yet seen Niagara Falls. Perhaps he had no way of judging the relative grandeur of Pine Orchard's cataract. For whatever reason, his early trip to the Falls at about the same time as Timothy Dwight visited them, brought a burst of enthusiasm similar to that of his partner in the clergy.⁸⁸ In June, 1864, his party

descended to the foot of the Falls by a difficult and dangerous path. . . .we were amply compensated for all our toil and risk. Here nature appears in all her grandeur and sublimity. Buried in the mountain solitude, you see no work of art to detract from the awful majesty of the scene, and hear no sounds but those of the torrent echoing to deep mountain valley. 89

A most elaborate description of the Kaaterskill Falls is recorded by romantic enthusiast Elizabeth Ellet. Her reputation for reflecting an inflated Romantic image is enhanced by this particular location; she outdoes herself to make the Cauterskill Falls romantic above reproach. The road to the Falls, designed for "carriages," is "rough, wild and rocky, but beautifully picturesque." About

⁸⁸See chapter 2, p. 107.

⁸⁹Dorr, op. cit., p. 49.

one-quarter mile from the Falls, the passengers debark and walk through the last leg of the valley of anticipation, along a

romantic road, admiring at every step, or stopping to gather the abundant variety of wild flowers. The beauty of this woodland path baffles all description.

At the Falls, Ellet's romantic sentimentality blocks any attention to detail.

At the end of the platform, you are close upon the water, hastening to precipitate itself over the rock upon which you stand and tumbling into the wildest ravine ever poet dreamed of. . . .The view from different points of the ravine, and the perpendicular wall forming its sides, is both splendid and sublime. 90

Ellet also indulged in a favorite romantic exercise -- going behind the "falling sheet" of water. It had become particularly popular at Niagara Falls, and possibly "going behind" the falling sheet at Cauterskill Falls was encouraged because of the comparable situation at Niagara Falls. Ellet's description strongly suggests that the path under Cauterskill Falls was planned to associate Cauterskill Falls with the Falls further west.⁹¹ Referring to the "watery path," Ellet explains that

It is somewhat 'on the plan' of Termination Rock behind the falling ocean at Niagara, and really gives an idea of that stupendous place, barring the thunders and the world of waters. A fine view is here obtained of the falling sheet, which

⁹⁰Ellet, (Rockwell, op. cit., pp. 234-35).

⁹¹See chapter 8 on Niagara Falls.

appears much larger and broader, while the sides of the ravine, and the dense forest seen through the showery curtain, present a scene beautiful beyond description. . . .Here is a noble view. ⁹²

Ellet also saw the dam in operation, although in contrast to Bayard Taylor, her romantic sensibilities were not much excited by it. She observes only that "the quantity of water is suddenly increased by opening the dam above, so that its roar fills the gorge." Much more impressive was the path descending into the gorge, and the view from the base of the falls.

The whole castellated amphitheatre is before you. The people walking within the cavern, just visible through the spray, look spectral enough, especially as they seem to have some secret of their own for clinging to the rocky wall, no path being apparent. It would require but little stretch of the imagination to suppose them children of the mist, or genii of the waterfall, particularly that light, fragile figure, whose white robe contrasts so wildly with the dark mass behind her. What a scene for deeds of romance and heroism! ⁹³

The "view from the top" and Cauterskill Falls -- these were the romantic attractions of Pine Orchard and the highlight of the Hudson River's scenery. After an overnight or a week at the Mountain House, tourists returned to Catskill and resumed their boat trip to Albany. For this last leg, comparatively uneventful and anti-climactic, diary entries were most often reflections and

⁹² Ellet, (Rockwell, op. cit., pp. 235-6).

⁹³ Ibid., p. 236.

memories of the first leg of the Hudson River journey and the Catskills, or expressions of anticipation for the long overland or canal trip to Niagara Falls. Typically, William Blane looked back, not ahead. Far away were the "lofty tops of the Catskills."⁹⁴ With Blane, let us too look back to the Catskills, and conclude this chapter by summarizing the iconology of the Catskills for those who, often at considerable expense and effort, visited Pine Orchard in the first part of the nineteenth century.

In introducing this chapter, we noted Charles Rockwell's distinction between the "religious teachings" and the "spiritual lessons" of the Catskills. Rockwell identified the "religious teachings" as (1) the temporal and spacial insignificance of man in comparison with the mountains and (2) the "presence and power" of God on earth as exemplified by the existence of mountains. These teachings were commonly accepted by travellers who made the trip to Pine Orchard and by those who did not. Thus, one American traveller of 1829 who remains anonymous did not climb up to Pine Orchard because he or she

came to the conclusion (after gazing at it a considerable time) that the fatigue of climbing to the summit would be infinitely greater than the pleasure which its airy situation would afford.

Yet from below, he or she recognized the "religious teachings" of the sight in commenting that it was "calculated

⁹⁴ William Newham Blane, An Excursion Through the United States and Canada During the Years 1822-1823 (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1824), p. 356.

to awaken in my mind a sense of the frailty of my nature and the greatness of God."⁹⁵

The "spiritual lessons" were not so apparent. They were not embodied in the physical facts of height and mass, but rather derived from the opportunity mountains provided to "read the Book of Nature." What can we say about those "spiritual lessons?" Part of the difficulty in answering this question is that we move from concrete physical presence to the sphere of contemplation and meditation -- to the realm of worship, if you will. Tyrone Power employed precisely that term when he

rested on the natural platform, which thrust from the hillside, forms a stand whence may be worshipped one of the most glorious prospects ever given by the Creator to man's imagination. 96

I would suggest that the tourists we have analyzed reflect at least four general images, by no means mutually exclusive, but rather mutually reinforcing, that for purposes of analysis we can distinguish as the lessons of the "Book of Nature which God has spread before us." Their importance is indicated by the way in which Park Benjamin invites his readers to partake of these lessons.

Come, then you multitude of uneducated mortals, and from this great book store your minds with deep reflections, leading to wisdom and happiness. 97

⁹⁵_____, American Sketches by a Native of the United States (London: John Miller, 40, Pall Mall, 1827), p. 9.

⁹⁶Power, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 217).

⁹⁷Benjamin, (Rockwell, op. cit., p. 223).

The basis for the "spiritual lessons" is, as I have already indicated at some length, the convergence of Scottish Common Sense Realism and Romanticism in American aesthetics. From the heights of the Catskills, the sensibilities resulting from these converged perspectives, led to a recognition of the unity of life. Although usually not developed further than this, some went as far as to conclude that there could only be one religion. Yet whatever function the "lesson" served, even if undifferentiated, the feeling of unity remained highly significant to Pine Orchard's tourists.

A second lesson was the visual confirmation of cosmic struggle, of light conquering darkness both figuratively and literally. Sunshine and dark clouds vied for dominance over the landscape. Tourists could see it all. The struggle of natural forces, inevitable and unpredictable, assumes almost an animated flavor in the reports from Pine Orchard. Similarly, persons felt their insignificance in observing the awesome power of nature going its course regardless of human desires. The crucial element here was size. The rain fell and the sun shone not only in one's backyard, but over all New England.

Not unrelated to the feeling of cosmic struggle was an appreciation of the fragile beauty of stillness. Persons responded to Pine Orchard not with noisy celebrations, but with a feeling of wonder which the overworked terminology of British aesthetics did not and could not

convey. The holiness and solemnity of the scene was other than simply sublime.

It is not the awfully alone which seals the lips, but that nature in her calmest mood can subdue the mind to silence. 98

Finally, and dependent on the first three lessons was a heightened appreciation of the mystical, contemplative or meditative mood. Pine Orchard left persons with a peace, an "inward elevation," a serenity which the activity of the world below denied to Pine Orchard's visitors. Persons at Pine Orchard were not there to comprehend, they were there for renewal, and they left with the feeling that despite an insatiable curiosity and continuing necessity to understand life, the world was ultimately incomprehensible. To the extent that visitors experienced this lesson, they left with a peace that gave perspective to their life in the valley below.

Given these subdued and often painfully embryonic "spiritual lessons," we can better understand why Pine Orchard held the attraction that it did for nineteenth century tourists. Obviously, it filled a need in the culture. And it is clear that the Hudson River as a whole, of which, after all, Pine Orchard was only the most famous site, became the "pride and glory of the Americans, being esteemed by them as presenting the most beautiful scenery in the United States."⁹⁹ As one British Wesleyan put it

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 222.

⁹⁹James Dixon, Personal Narratives of a Tour Through Part

in 1849, "It well deserves its fame."¹⁰⁰ Or with characteristic understatement, an American suggested that it was "well worthy of a visit."¹⁰¹

of the United States and Canada (New York: Lane and Scott, 1849), p. 161.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Disturnell, The Traveller's Guide (1864), op. cit., p. 39.

Chapter 5:
A Wilderness Environment

The steamboats from New York to Albany were smooth, fast and spacious by contemporary American standards, and travellers apparently winked at their atrocious safety record. The trip could be accomplished without interruption, or fashionable tourists could debark at any of numerous landings to spend a half day, a night, or even a week at an inn constructed for their convenience. Pine Orchard, of course, provided the best in scenery and comfort. Little wonder that the 150 mile trip was long considered the ultimate in travel.

At Albany, the situation changed. Passenger boats went no further. Tourists who did not immediately return to New York City faced at least four travel options. They could continue (1) north by coach to Saratoga Springs, or one of its many less famous rival "watering places" such as Ballston Spa,¹ (2) north by stage and boat to Montreal and then down the St. Lawrence, (3) east by stage to Boston (a shorter version of the "fashionable tour") or (4) west by either stage, or after 1825, by canal boat, to Niagara Falls. My interest is in those who sought the natural wonders of the New World and went west.

Just as the modes of transportation between Albany and Niagara Falls were different from the steamboats plying the Hudson, so were the experiences of tourists different.

¹For a description of several "watering places," see John Disturnell, Springs, Waterfalls, Sea-Bathing Resorts and Mountain Scenery in the United States and Canada (New York: John Disturnell, 1855).

In introducing the second part of this study, it is important to understand some reasons why the trip west was so different from the trip north. Most tourists who travelled across New York State were seeking the sublime and the beautiful. But they observed more than sublime and beautiful scenery. (1) They were thrust upon a transportation system not designed for tourists or catering to them. (2) They viewed environmentally disastrous settlement patterns and commercial development and attempted to predict the area's potential for further settlement and development. (3) They paid particular attention to the removal of three symbols of the wilderness: (a) trees, the principal "obstacle" to development, (b) native Americans, known as "Indians," and (c) wild animals. The problems of civilizing a seemingly endless wilderness often became as important to the general traveller as the contemplation of romantic scenery, especially during the long rides through sparsely populated areas.

In this chapter, I shall analyze briefly aspects of the new wilderness environment which characterized the trip from Albany to Niagara Falls. These contrast with the isolated "natural wonders," particularly waterfalls, where romantic considerations and sensibilities reasserted themselves. In the two succeeding chapters, we shall resume our pilgrimage west and focus on the "natural wonders" of central New York which relieved the boredom of the trip. These minor wonders released part of the pent-up romantic enthusiasm which pilgrims seeking the

sublime and the beautiful expected to gush forth at Niagara Falls.

Although the Hudson River was considered a "beaten path," the Mohawk River and roads west from Albany, before they were superseded by the Erie Canal, and despite the great numbers of settlers, immigrants and tourists who travelled with them, could hardly be dignified by such a name. Nevertheless a relatively well developed transportation network between Albany and Utica had existed from Revolutionary days and the "Ontario and Genesee Turnpike Road" was "completed" from Utica to Buffalo in 1798.² Yet the roads remained primitive and travelling was hazardous. John Duncan, a Scot, complained that as late as 1818-19, the "turnpike" west of Schenectady "was improving in depth, every yard that [he] advanced."³ Furthermore, the public transportation companies were understandably more interested in turning a profit than in servicing the whims of individual tourists. Because travellers were usually limited to the prescribed routes of public conveyances, there was therefore very little exploration of the

² Jane L. Mesick, The English Traveller in America 1785-1835 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), p. 18. For a further discussion of early transportation, see Clayton Mau, The Development of Central and Western New York from the Arrival of the White Man to the Eve of the Civil War (Rochester, New York: The DuBois Press, 1944).

³ John M. Duncan, Travels Through Part of the United States and Canada in 1818 and 1819 (Glasgow: Printed at the University Press for Hurst, Robinson, and Company, London, 1823), Vol. II, p. 8.

countryside. E. T. Coke (1807-1888), a British officer on furlough who travelled across New York in 1832, complained that

Neither the coachman nor ourselves had ever travelled in the direction we were going; so alike uncertain whither we were going, but trusting to chance and good fortune, we renewed our journey, grumbling against America and its miserable roads, and arriving at the following conclusion -- that to move out of the common coach route, to leave the turnpike road which was passable, and to attempt exploring new and undescribed scenery by striking out a line of road for ourselves, would never answer any end, and was in itself almost impracticable -- that for the future, we must be content with the old wellworn track of former tourists, and visit no places but those notified in the "Stranger's Guide" or "Northern Traveller."⁴

The Genesee Road and the Mohawk River were the two principal routes west of Albany until 1825 when the Erie Canal came into service.⁵ For the first half of the nineteenth

⁴Edward Thomas Coke, A Subaltern's Furlough; Descriptive of Scenes in Various Parts of the United States, Upper and Lower Canada, New-Brunswick and Nova Scotia, during the summer and autumn of 1832 (New York: J. and J. Harper, 1833), Vol. II, p. 11. Coke refers to Theodore Dwight (1796-1866), The Northern Traveller: Containing the Routes to Niagara, Quebec, and the Springs. . . .with Description of the Principal Scenes, and Useful Hints to Strangers (New York: Wilder and Campbell, 1825). This volume went through four editions by the date of Coke's tour. The second edition, "improved and extended," was published by A. T. Goodrich in New York in 1826. The third edition was combined with H. D. Gilpin's Northern Tour and was published in New York by Carvill in 1828. The fourth edition was published in New York by J. and J. Harper, the printers of the first edition, in 1830. There were several "Stranger's Guides," but none, as far as I know, for upstate New York. I know only of guides under that title published at and about the cities of New York, Philadelphia and Boston.

⁵For further information on the Erie Canal, see Ronald E. Shaw, Erie Water West: A History of the Erie Canal 1792-1854 (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1966).

century, upstate wilderness images were usually based on scenes from these three routes.

In 1811, J. E. Dunlop, a Briton, reported that "from Albany, there is a stage coach which sets off three times a week for Niagara."⁶ Actually there was a fifteen hour daily service between Albany and Utica, and from there, coaches left for the west on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. One could board a coach in Utica at 4:00 A.M. and arrive in Geneva an indefinite number of hours (days?) later. The fare was \$5.00. For \$.75, one could continue another seven hours on the same coach to Canandagua, a mere seventeen miles further west. Then at 4:00 A.M. the next day (whatever day that turned out to be), the coach left Canandagula for Buffalo with a scheduled arrival for noon the following day. The last leg of the trip cost \$.06 per mile. Operators could not guarantee completion of the trip, and did not charge full fare prior to some assurance that the coach was actually going to reach its scheduled destination. Furthermore, scheduled coach service from Canandagua west did not begin until 1819. Before then tourists were on their own!⁷

One might legitimately ask -- why not lie over en route to rest up for the next leg? In fact, many did.

⁶J. B. Dunlop, Diary, September, 1810 - November, 1811 (Mss. New-York Historical Society), n.p.

⁷See further, Robert W. Bingham and Ralph E. Theobald, Niagara, Highway of Heroes (Buffalo: Foster and Stewart Publishing Corporation, 1943).

But comfort was not the principal reason for such layovers. Rather, the "natural curiosities" that marked ones progress towards Niagara provided the occasions for rest. Cohoes Falls, Little Falls of the Mohawk, Trenton Falls, the scenery of the Finger Lakes region and Genesee Falls, along with scattered towns and villages, served to break up the monotony of the journey. In the early days, laying over was a calculated risk.

The inconvenience of travelling by stage is incalculable. . . .To leave the stage would subject you to a residence among those people for some weeks, probably, or compel you to proceed in a waggon, exposed to all the arts of inconvenience which the Inkeepers [sic] on the road are well 8 experienced in.

Clearly the horse or mule-drawn conveyances from Albany to Buffalo were primitive compared to the luxurious boats which steamed up the Hudson River.

In spite of these difficulties, the curiosity of visitors, the hopes of settlers and the dreams of entrepreneurs led to the rapid development of western New York. Traffic grew and transportation facilities improved. Even the "search of some incident which may be rather out of the common way, and which may vary some little the common pages of their diary"⁹ drew tourists on forays away from what was quickly becoming another "beaten path." But most played it safe -- the inns were not known for their comfort

⁸Dunlop, op. cit.

⁹Coke, op. cit.

and travellers were reluctant to trust their luck. E. T. Coke and his party "had not the spice of a true romantic spirit" in them; they "preferred a warm supper and a good dry mattress, in an comfortable inn, to weathering it out in unknown country."¹⁰ Others were not so fortunate in their accommodations. During a trip in the summer of 1810, DeWitt Clinton was roused out of a deep sleep by an attack of bedbugs. However, he made the best of his misfortune, trading bothersome insects for romantic scenery. He left his roommate

to his meditations, and went out on the point. The moon was in its full orb and blaze of unclouded majesty. Here my feelings were not only relieved, but my mind was elevated by the scene before me.¹¹

Besides minimal sanitation facilities another factor in the "want of healthiness" was the ague, prevalent especially in the marshy portions of the state through which the stage coach travelled. In 1825, even guidebook writer H. D. Gilpin warned that Waterloo, a town seven miles east of Geneva, was once "severely visited by the ague." Yet in spite of the trials and inconveniences, Beaufoy observed in 1828, that the number of travellers in July, August and September was so great "as frequently to cause several [persons] to be put into the same bedroom,

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹William W. Campbell, The Life and Writings of DeWitt Clinton (1769-1828) (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849), p. 71.

besides other annoyances."¹²

The Hudson River Valley and the corridor between Albany and Buffalo were both subject to extensive development during the first half of the nineteenth century. However, they were "civilized" under quite different circumstances. The Hudson River Valley below Catskill had become a "suburb" of New York City.¹³ Summer houses, country estates, renowned views, facilities for day and weekend outings, good transportation -- all this gave to the lower Hudson River Valley an urbane romantic interest. The mid-state corridor, on the other hand, was far enough from the madding crowd to develop in quite another manner. It became a haven for settlers from New England and immigrants from the Old World. Understandably, both groups were more concerned with food and shelter than with romantic scenery. Agriculture and "wilderness workshops"¹⁴ were developed along functional lines with little consideration for traditional and particularly British aesthetic considerations.¹⁵

¹²Beaufoy, Tour Through Parts of the United States and Canada by a British Subject (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1828), p. 72-3.

¹³Charles Rockwell, The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around (New York: Taintor Brothers, Company, 1867), pp. 219-220. See also chapter 4, footnote 16.

¹⁴See further, Marvin Fisher, Workshops in the Wilderness: The European Response to American Industrialization 1830-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

¹⁵See further John Kouwenhoven, The Arts in Modern American Civilization (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1967).

Travellers from Albany to Niagara Falls rode through a war-torn environment. On the one hand was the settler, a soldier of civilization. On the other were three unarmed enemies -- the tree, the native American, and the wild animal. William Barnes sets the tone for the contest in identifying the three symbols of the wilderness trying to hold out against the onslaught of the white man's superior forces.

No western prairie, with its teeming soil pregnant with future harvests greets the eye. All is primitive forests, over which breeds a stillness that is terrible in its intensity and gloom. He comes with his axe upon his shoulder, and his rifle in his hands, to encounter the stubborn forces of Nature, the attack of wild beasts, and the still more dreaded enmity of the Indians, who, half civilized and thoroughly demoralized. . . . still hang on to the flanks of the white man. The forest trees fall before the blows of his axe, and in a short time the log house, that first outpost of the army of civilization, stands guard over a 'little clearing' with its roughly cultivated [garden] wedged in between stumps and tangled roots of trees.¹⁶

Yet while the victory of civilization was predictable, it did not blind some to the extent of the destruction.

Settlers were ever-present. They and their meagre belongings were the tourist's companions on canal boats and wagons; they peopled the growing villages through which

¹⁶William Barnes, "Seventh Annual Address Delivered Before the Pioneer Association of Central New York, September 16, 1875" (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, Printers, 1875), p. 4. This pamphlet is among a collection in the Cornell University Library entitled New York State Pamphlets, vol. 6.

the tourists rode; they were glimmers of civilization along the roadside. Some claimed that these seekers of a new life, whether emigrating from lands in the eastern United States or from the Old World, became human symbols of the wilderness in assuming the wild habits of their immediate wilderness environment. C. T., an otherwise anonymous traveller in the Mohawk Valley in 1809, believed that he found evidence of cultural regression. Yet he also trusted that

book societies, being managed by a committee, whose selections are observed and remarked upon, will have a tendency to counteract the depraved taste which has crept into so many families of the back country. 17

In spite of occasional negative evaluations of pioneer life, two observations were more common. (1) Settlers rapidly "improved" their land, conquering the wilderness in accordance with the ideals of western civilization. (2) In spite of the comforts of a settled life, a mood of restlessness and a desire to continue west pervaded the pioneer communities. With respect to the second, Basil Hall, whose trenchant observations on the New World often enraged American readers, but are among the most valuable to modern historians, suggested that

This passion for turning up new soils, and clearing the wilderness, heretofore untouched by the hand of man, is said to increase with years. Under such constant

¹⁷ T. C., A Ride to Niagara in 1809 (Two hundred copies reprinted in October, 1915, from the Portfolio for July, August, September, and October, for George P. Humphrey, Rochester, New York), p. 47.

changes of place, there can be very little regard felt or professed for individual spots. I might almost say, that so far as I could learn or see, there is nothing in any part of America similar to what we [English] call local attachments. There is a strong love of country, it is true, but this is quite a different affair, as it seems to be relatively unconnected with any permanent fondness for one spot more than another. 18

For travellers more attuned to views than moods, the rapid "improvement" of the land was a major element in the images they left for posterity. James Fenimore Cooper claimed that only rarely did settlers "struggle for years in a condition, between rude civilization, and one approaching to that of a hunter." Rather

when emigration has set steadily towards any favoured point for a reasonable time, it is absurd to seek for any vestige of a barbarous life among the people. The emigrants carry with them. . . .the wants, the habits, and the institutions of an advanced state of society. . . .The trunks of trees, piled upon each other. . . . are soon succeeded by dwellings of wood, in a taste, magnitude, and comfort, that are utterly unknown to men of similar means in any other quarter of the worldFrom fifty or a hundred of these centers of exertion, spread swarms, that in a few years shall convert masses of dark forests into populous, wealthy and industrious countries. 19

A similar analysis is reflected in Ebenezer Mix's

¹⁸ Basil Hall, Travels in North America, in the Years 1827 and 1828 (Philadelphia, 1829), Vol. I, pp. 146-47.

¹⁹ James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of the Americans: Picked Up by a Travelling Bachelor (London: Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street, 1828), p. 329-30.

famous series of four engravings depicting the "Pioneer's Progress." Published in Orsamus Turner's 1849 volume entitled The Holland Purchase, Mix etched his interpretation of the "pioneer's progress" from the perspective of one who, living in Batavia, New York, knew and understood the problems of transforming a wilderness into a settled community.²⁰ Like Cooper, Mix emphasizes the rapidity of settlement.

In the first engraving, it is winter. Domestic animals forage for food among the fallen trees surrounding the chimneyless, window-less log cabin. An untamed forest ominously encircles the settlement, though the pioneer, with ax in hand, appears equal to the task of conquering it. Arcadian tranquility settles over the scene with the coming of summer -- a well-stocked garden, more cleared land, healthy animals, a small child and even domestic flowers grace the settler's home less than one year after he and his wife had arrived. The scene appears idyllic, but Beaufoy suggests that primitive traces could still be discerned.

I was obliged to look at the stumps of trees among the young wheat, the great proportion of dark firs, mingled with the beech, birch, and sugar maple, or the

²⁰ Orsamus Turner, The Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of Western New York: Embracing Some Account of the Ancient Remains. . . and a History of Pioneer Settlement Under the Auspices of the Holland Company (Buffalo: Jewett, Thomas and Company, 1849). The engravings have been reproduced in Clayton Mau, op. cit., between pages 242 and 243.

zig-zag fences of split trunks, before I
 could believe myself 300 miles in the interior of America. 21

Ten years pass, and though living in the same cabin for reasons of sentiment, even though expanded and improved, the farm looks plush. There are rail fences, a barn, orchards, wagons and even a school house in the distance. Forty-five years after the initial settlement, the settler is wealthy, having large flocks, herds, and grain supplies in a rural setting such as Thomas Cole painted from his perch above the Connecticut River in "The Oxbow."

Throughout this entire development, progress was not in any sense made according to some established notion as to what constituted the proper use of land. The models for development were highly pragmatic -- vernacular expressions of the need for ingenuity in order to survive the natural elements against which the settlers fought. Those who did not know necessity as the mother of invention were bound to suffer, even if only with a dose of hurt pride. William Cooper (1754-1809), who settled and lorded over the town he named for himself, told with transparent enthusiasm the story of an Irishman who failed in the European art of husbandry.

At length, the gentleman found out that it was one thing to dress his pleasure ground in Ireland, and quite another to clear the wilderness in America, and finished by admitting that in matters of

²¹Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 54.

husbandry, experience was a better guide than either fancy or philosophy and none were more capable than those whom practice had made proficient. 22

If the speed of the settler's victory over the wilderness was impressive to tourists, the rapid decay of the virgin forests, and the extinction of native Americans and wild animals was equally impressive. The losers also received mention in the diaries and journals of travellers. Most accounts were simply journalistic reportage, but on occasion the diarist editorialized in sympathy with the losers.

Since the New York State wilderness was a conifer and deciduous forest, not a barren desert or a treeless tundra, the "monarchs of nature" were both the most omnipresent feature of the wilderness and the most formidable barrier to settlement. Trees appeared to be a menacing enemy, but proved impotent on the battlefield. Frances Wright's enthusiasm for these "giants" contrasts with William Barnes' description of the pioneer's successful offensive. Wright

often paused to admire the giant trees, scattered tastefully here and there by the hand of nature; their enormous trunks rooted in alluvial soil, pointing up their stems into mid-air, like the columns of some Gothic minister, and then flinging abroad their mighty arms, from which the

²² William Cooper, A Guide in the Wilderness; or The History of the First Settlements in the Western Counties of New York (Dublin: Printed by Gilbert and Hodges, 37 Dame Street, 1810), p. 38. William Cooper was the father of James Fenimore Cooper.

graceful foliage dropping downwards,
 opposed, in beautiful contrast, the rich
 verdure with the clean and polished bark.
 The finest trees that I had ever seen
 before, had been dwarfs, if placed beside
 these mighty giants. 23

Reflecting on the difference between American and English
 trees, Wright continues her metaphor of gothic spires as
 an image of "majesty." Lifting eyes and thoughts to the
 heavens above, elegance and grace characterize American
 trees.

(. . . .dropped by the hand of nature with
 more taste than perhaps art could rival),
 [they] have a character which might be
 termed one of simple majesty, while those
 of England are remarkable for a romantic
 or even savage grandeur. The gnarled oak,
 his boughs covered with lichens, thrust
 forth horizontally but grotesquely, stands
 beneath the watery skies of England, a
 hardy veteran, reared to brave the elements,
 and opposing his broad and shaggy forehead
 to the storm, as reckless of its fury, and
 indifferent alike to the smiles and frowns
 of heaven. Vegetation here being more
 rapid, the American tree puts forth larger
 shoots, springing upwards to the sun,
 stern, straight, smooth and silvery, and
 flinging forth his sweeping branches to
 wave with every gust. This perhaps applies
 more peculiarly to the elm, a tree of
 singular grace and beauty, but answers,
 more or less, to all the nobler sons of
 the forest. In general, the wood of this
 country is of superior stature to that of
 our island, but is charged with fewer
 branches, or more properly speaking, twigs.
 Under an oak in England, you can barely see
 a winter's heaven; here, when stripped of
 its foliage, the most rugged tree would
 afford no shelter. There is, in short,

²³ Frances Wright, Views of Society and Manners in America;
a Series of Letters from that Country to a Friend in
England During the years 1818, 1819 and 1820. (London:
 Longman, Hurst, Orme, and Brown, 1821), p. 196.

less wood, or rather it shoots upwards more in straight lines; the foliage is magnificent, and wonderful varied in its shade. 24

Barnes hardly noticed the trees. His concern was the settler.

To enlarge the borders of his 'clearing,' the husband and father now toils with renewed energy and with the thews and sinews of Hercules displaying the same indomitable courage which he showed at Herkimer and Oriskany, at Saratoga and Yorktown, and every week sees the mighty monarchs of the forest lying prostrate before his advancing footsteps, a confused mass of birch, maple, hemlock, chestnut and pine. . . . But for these peaceful victories over Nature, no widow mourned a husband forever lost, or lonely parents of a son, struck down in the morning of his days. 25

The "peaceful victories" were usually of two kinds -- clearcutting and girdling. Initially the settler would cut everything within the immediate vicinity of his proposed settlement.

In general, the settler cuts to right and left with unsparing fury, anxious only to clear the giant weeds which obstruct the light and choke his respiration. It is a natural impulse, perhaps, which leads him thus unthinkingly, to lay bare his cabin to the heavens; but some may doubt if it is very wise, and all will agree that it is in very bad taste. 26

What logs could not be used easily for forewood, lumber, or fence material, were burned, with the stumps left in the ground to rot. These graves remained for some time.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 198-9.

²⁵Barnes, op. cit., p. 4.

²⁶Wright, op. cit., p. 193.

There is certainly some difference in the duration of these relicks of the forest, according to the durable qualities of the original growth of timber. Still, more or less of these rude and ungainly accompaniments are still to be found in two thirds of the landscapes of these regions.²⁷

Outside the immediate site of his cabin, the pioneer cut or girdled unwanted trees. By girdling, the trees were subjected to a slow death, and cutting was therefore the preferred method. Cooper indicated that girdled trees were

rather exceptions, than characteristic. It is a manner of improving certainly much practiced in the south, and sometimes in the more northern states; but it is far from being either the best, or the ordinary mode of clearing land, in any great section of the country. The tree is commonly felled by cutting it at such a distance from the earth, as may be most convenient to the stature of the chopper.²⁸

While Americans such as Barnes, representing the interests of the pioneer, were synpathetic to the problems of settlement, European tourists who viewed settlements as one element of the landscape and in contrast to the surrounding wilderness, were often less enthusiastic. Thomas Cather, a British traveller of aristocratic connections, travelled through upstate New York in 1836 and displayed the mixed feelings of one who both marvelled at the process of clearing land, and at the same time clearly cherished the grace of a virgin forest.

²⁷Cooper, Notions, op. cit., p. 341.

²⁸Ibid.

One day came upon a tract of forest two or three miles square. The moldering logs and the blackened fire scathed stumps presented a very melancholy appearance. What a grand sight the conflagration must have been! Imagine the warring and crackling flames, and the terror and astonishment of the wild beasts.

Further along the road, the image changed to

Cedar swamps, silent gloomy solitude, almost impenetrable from the close interlaced branches and the fallen and decaying timber. Sometimes in the heart of the wilderness, I have chanced upon a lovely little spot, carpeted with luxuriant moss, far softer than the richest Turkish rug, and glowing in the sunshine, which poured down through the parted branches overhead.²⁹

Frances Wright also cherished these "peculiarit[ies] of the American forest" -- "fine smooth carpets of verdure spread by the hand of nature over the surface of the soil." In general, however, Wright was not happy with the landscape. She wrote in her diary after leaving Utica for the west, that

The country begins to assume a rough appearance; stumps and girdled trees encumbering the inclosures; log-houses scattered here and there, and the cultivation rarely extending more than half a mile, nor usually so much, on either hand; when the forest, whose face is usually rendered hideous to the eye of the traveller by a skirting line of girdled trees, half standing, half falling, stretches its vast, unbroken shade over the plain, and hill and dale, disappearing only with the horizon. Frequently, however, gaining a rising ground, you can distinguish gaps,

²⁹Thomas Cather, Voyage to America: The Journals of Thomas Cather (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), Edited with an Introduction by Thomas Yoseloff, Illustrated with contemporary drawings by Harry Tyler, p. 156.

sometimes long and broad, in the deep verdure, which tell that the axe and the plow are waging war with the wilderness. 30

Basil Hall also criticized the carnage, but his critique was tempered by his understanding that some method of clearing land was necessary. As usual, he put his ideas in strong language, but he also spoke a good deal of common sense.

The cleared spaces, as they are called, looked to our eyes not less desolate [than the villages], being studded over with innumerable great black stumps; or, which was more deplorable still, with tall scorched branchless stems of trees, which had undergone the barbarous operation known as girdling. An American settler can hardly conceive the horror with which a foreigner beholds such numbers of magnificent trees standing around him with their throats cut, the very Banquos of the murdered forest! . . . those wretched trunks present the most miserable objects of decrepitude that can be conceived. The purpose of the farmer, however, is gained, and that is all he can be expected to look to. His corn crop is no longer overshadowed by the leaves of these unhappy trees, which, in process of time, are cut down and split into railings, or sawed into billets of firewood. Their misery 31 is at an end.

Charles Dickens was a bit more imaginative in his famous report of his 1842 visit to the New World. As might be expected, Dickens associated the burned stumps with elements of the European literary tradition. On his way to Niagara Falls, he stated without negative comment, that "the varying illusions" the stumps

³⁰Wright, op. cit., p. 194.

³¹Hall, op. cit.

present to the unaccustomed eye as it grows dark, are quite astonishing in their number and reality. Now, there is a Grecian urn erected in the centre of a lovely field; now there is a woman weeping at a tomb; now a very common-place old gentleman in a white waistcoat, with a thumb thrust into each arm-hole of his coat, now a student poring over a book; now a crouching Negro; now, a horse, a dog, a cannon, an armed man; a hunchback throwing off his cloak and stepping forth into the light. 32

In spite of occasional European attempts at ornamental gardening in the midst of the American wilderness,³³ most tourists elected to remain fashionable tourists. As a group, the settler's instinct was to clear the land, giving rise to James Fenimore Cooper's observation that the "admixture of civilization with these wild-looking memorials of a state of nature [was] the chief distinctive feature" between American landscapes and European landscapes.³⁴ But the distinction was confused during later stages of settlement. Initially, the

native forest is generally in sight; and, as the human eye is prone to rest with pleasure on what is uncommon, an American usually considers an open plain as nature's most beautiful feature. The settler's first desire is to have a clear view of the heavens; when his patch of ground is completely naked, he tells you, that it looks handsome.

The irony is that as the forest recedes, trees are

³² Charles Dickens, American Notes for General Circulation (New York: 1842 and London: Chapman and Hall, 1842), p. 379.

³³ See particularly the reports of Basil Hall, op. cit., pp. 206-7 and Frances Wright, op. cit., p. 194 for a discussion of one such project.

³⁴ Cooper, Notions, op. cit., p. 342.

less associated with wolves and bears, swamps and agues; and gradually he conceives the desire that some sheltering boughs were spread between his roof and the scorching rays of July's sun. His object now is to plant the tree that will grow the fastest; and so consequently the finest sons of the forest are seldom those that he patronizes.³⁵

The war of civilization against the wilderness was never so vicious and organized as in the attempt to remove the most feared threat to the settlers, the native Americans. Prior to the opening of the trans-Mississippi west, the "Indian problem" in upstate New York was one of the most acute for the new and struggling country. New York State had some of the largest and best organized tribes of native peoples in North America as well as an unusually large population of white settlers. Between 1790 and 1840, it is reported that one-sixth of the Union's white population lived in New York State. Of course, many people lived in the metropolitan area. Nevertheless, the rapid growth of New York City during this period must not mask the concurrent importance of the increased population of upstate. Disturnell boasted that by 1842, the

increase in population has been so rapid as to attract the attention of intelligent men throughout Christendom. Sixty years ago, the whole section of the state from Utica to Buffalo was all a wilderness, occupied by tribes of roving Indians. It now embraces 28 counties and more than a million of inhabitants, enjoying all the comforts and many of the elegances of

³⁵Wright, op. cit., p. 197.

civilized life, distinguished for general intelligence and enterprise, and rapidly advancing numbers, wealth and all the elements of social prosperity and power.³⁶

The conflict between the wilderness ways of the native Americans and the explanations of European settlers in many ways parallels that between trees and settlers. But unlike trees, passive in the face of attack, the natives actively resisted the onslaught of civilization. Although this made them all the more dangerous in the eyes of the settlers, trees and the natives were treated to the same methods of removal. Both were cut or girdled. Tyrone Power made the analogy clear.

I am not sure whether it would not be more humane to deal upon the natives as summarily as with the forests; for the fall of the former before the advance of civilization is not, though certain, less certain. They may at present be likened to girdled trees, about whose vigorous trunk the axe of the woodsman is but lightly drawn, yet whose fall is assured past remedy; the springs of life and health are stopped; . . . for a little while they continue to wave their naked crests in the gale, and hold forth their gaunt limbs as if life were in them, objects exciting at once commiseration and disgust; until, crumbled into decay, the unseemly skeletons lie prostrate athwart the roots of their once fellows who were stricken down in their bloom, and so perished by a quicker, more merciful sentence.³⁷

³⁶ John Disturnell, A Gazetteer of the State of New York: Comprising Its Topography, Geology, Mineralogical Resources, Civil Divisions, Canals, Railroads, and Public Institutions; Together with General Statistics; the Whole Alphabetically Arranged. Also Statistical Tables Including the Census of 1840; and Tables of Distances with a New Township Map of the State (Albany: John Disturnell, 1842), p. 27.

³⁷ Tyrone Power, Impressions of America (Philadelphia, 1836), Vol. I, p. 390. Power visited America during the years 1833-34.

The common European description of the native American was not the glamorous image of the noble savage. The "disgust" with which these native Americans were viewed may be explained partly by the unexpected contrast between their romantic ideal and the New World reality. An Englishman named Addington (d. 1870), who visited upstate New York in 1822-1825, wrote that some natives had

contrived to turn their hands, not their hearts, to the cultivation of the land, but most of them still hold to the bow and the fishing rod, and idle about the white villages in the neighborhood, the men in a sort of demi-national costume, with the comical addition of round hats and the women wrapped up, even in the dog days, in blankets, with their barbarian brats slung on their backs. They are, in general, an ugly and ungainly race, with their mahogany faces and immobility of feature, their course mane and lonely locks, greasy and pendulous, and their waddling gait and inverted toes. They have dropped the picturesque of complete barbarism, without acquiring the decency of civilization, and preserve therefore all the vices in appearance and manners of a medium condition 38 between the two.

Outright personal attack on these denizens of the wilderness was common from Europeans who had only minimal contact with the American natives and whose visions of white Anglo-Saxon glory and destiny had not been tempered

³⁸ Henry Unwin Addington, Youthful America: Selections from Henry Unwin Addington's Residence in the United States of America, 1822, 1823, 1824, 1825. Edited with an introduction and notes by Bradford Perkins (Berkeley, California: The University of California Press, 1960), p. 74. Addington was charge d'affaires for Britain in Washington, D.C. For an excellent and suggestive discussion of the images of the native American by white America and Europeans, see Roy Harvey Pearce.

by direct and continuing experience with competing visions. Distance bred misunderstanding. The settlers, while fearing the terror they experienced at the hands of the natives, at least learned to respect the wilderness ways of the natives, and adopted some of them for their own use. Even DeWitt Clinton, whose visions of national destiny were a beacon to fellow propagandists for America's world-wide glory, let a respect for the majesty of the native Americans creep into his imperialist sentiments. On July 6, 1810, Clinton entered this in his diary after landing near present day Amsterdam, New York.

An imagination, I was carried back to the time, when this country was occupied by roving barbarians and savage beasts, when every trace of refinement and civilization was excluded. . . .In the course of time, he felt the power of the man of Europe. He struggled against his arts and his arms, and after a lapse of two centuries, he is banished from the country which bears the bones of his ancestors; and the powerful nation of the Mohawks, which formerly struck terror as far as the Mississippi, is now dwindled down to absolute insignificance. 39

Further loosening of Addington's prejudice born of misunderstanding is found in James Fenimore Cooper. Cooper, after all, had grown up in Cooperstown, where he knew and enjoyed the company of natives during his childhood and youth. Certainly the characters of the Leatherstocking Tales reflect some concern and interest in the life and welfare of the native American. Similar

³⁹ Campbell, op. cit., pp. 36-7.

to Clinton's diary entry, Cooper's fiction portrayed an image of a glorious past, a past which was removed from the realities of the present. Cooper's image of the New York State native in 1828, the year he published Notions of the Americans, was somewhat different from the honest simplicity of his later fictional characters.

a few peaceable and half-civilized remains of tribes have been permitted to reclaim small portions of land -- an inhabitant of New York. . . .has to traverse many hundred leagues of territory to enjoy even the sight of an Indian, in a tolerably wild condition. A few degraded descendants, are indeed seen wandering among the settlements, but the Indian must now be chiefly sought west of the Mississippi, to be found in any 40 of his savage grandeur.

Short of outright condemnation of the white slaughter of native Americans, some Americans saw the brutality of this battle between wilderness and civilization without actually laying any blame. Estwick Evans, whose famous Pedestrious Tour of 1818 was a model for later American travel narratives, sketched his general impression of the "upper part of the state of New York." It was

comparatively a wilderness. There are here many Indian reserves. They are solitary places; they are dark spots on the face of civilization. The tawny inhabitants of the gloomy forests, generally establish themselves in the most remote situations, and render the access to them indirect and difficult. . . .There is a shyness and wildness in their aspect. . . .No cause of wonder is it, that these persecuted beings

⁴⁰Cooper, Notions, op. cit., p. 328.

look with a jealous eye upon the descendants of these Europeans. . . .They see no end of avarice, the claims, or the progress of white men; and view themselves between the horrors of civilization, and the illimitable expanse of the Pacific Ocean. 41

Furthermore, the sight of these brutalized natives elicited a yearning nostalgia for the simple, freer ways of the noble savage. A mystique of nobility infected the sentiments of several tourists who found the refined delicacies of civilization more a burden than a liberation. American John Duncan had plenty of time to reflect on his wilderness experience. He travelled fifty miles in twenty hours in 1818-19, no doubt much of the time moving imperceptibly in a flood of mud. His experience caused him to remark,

Had it been possible for the Oneyda warrior of former days to have looked down on our uncouth array, how scornfully would he have smiled at the white man, muffled in great coats, and skulking around under umbrellas, feebly dragging their steps around every little pool of water, and turning out of the way to avoid a fallen tree, where he had been accustomed to chase the deer or the panther with a foot as light as the animal's before him, dashing through opposint torrents and bounding like an antelope over every obstruction. 42

Neither was John Fowler convinced that the "extirpation" of the natives was entirely justified. While he exposed

⁴¹ Estwick Evans, Pedestrious Tour of 4000 Miles in 1818. Reprint of the Original Edition which was published in Concord, New Hampshire in 1819. In Reuben G. Thwaites (ed.) Early Western Travels 1748-1846 (Cleveland, 1904), Vol. 8, pp. 91-364. Quotation is on page 52 of the original edition.

⁴² Duncan, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 13.

no particular yearning for a noble past, he was at least raising questions as to whether the white man's actions had been Christian.

I leave it to the philosopher, the moralist, the philanthropist, the Christian to say, whether, if the good of mankind, and not the mere aggrandizement of territory had led to [the native American] extirpation -- for whatever virtues of brilliancy of character they might possess in some respects, they were but mere children of the forest, averse to all but the savage and uncivilized states of life -- looking upon America now, and comparing her with what she then was, and under such a people ever would have been, whether in all the varied, vast, and important advantages which have followed their subjugation, the result would not have justified the act. 43

An unusually strong attack on the white subjugation of the native Americans by a Briton includes some interesting comparisons of white and native cultures. In 1811 near Schenectady, J. B. Dunlap participated in July 4th celebrations. But his mind wandered from the meaning of the day to "serious thoughts on the mutability of the Earth's establishments." After all, only "forty years" before, the site of these celebrations was a "frightful and terrific forrest [sic] inhabited by savage Mohawks."

What, thought I, could these lands have exhibited here a century ago when inhabited by the fiercest Indian Nations: Could the warlike Mohawk. . . . have supposed it possible in the Nature of Events? . . . that in so short a time his power should be

⁴³ John Fowler, Journal of a Tour in the State of New York in the Year 1830; With Remarks on Agriculture in those Parts Most Eligible for Settlement (London: Whittaker, Treacher and Arnot, 1831), pp. 130-131.

annihilated and himself and children,
 drawn from Nature's soil, to make room
 for an avaricious people: what would have
 been his feelings? Could he have looked
 forward to this evening and observed the
 descendants of his enemies of that country
 which they had wrested from him by acts
 of oppression and injustice? 44

The existence of native peoples encouraged some reflection
 on the value of the wilderness life and the follies of
 civilization and the "mutability" of institutions.

Besides the trees and the natives, wild animals
 were no less an enemy to the settlers. Yet in contrast
 to the trees and the natives, the wildlife of upstate New
 York was rarely observed by tourists. While the battle
 against wildlife was not easy, the settlers' efforts had
 been so successful that persons not seeking wildlife
 rarely saw it. In the vicinity of Schenectady, James
 Fenimore Cooper reported that as early as 1848,

wild beasts. . . have no existence in these
 regions. A solitary bear, or panther, or
 even a wolf, wandering near the flocks of a
 country twenty years old, has an effect like
 that produced by an invasion. . . ere twenty
 years expire from settlement, the appear-
 ance of a wolf among the American farms is
 far less common than in the most ancient
 plains of certain parts of France. 45

Also, for reasons which are not clear, zoological curi-
 osity was minimal during this period. Insofar as tourists
 were interested in natural history, their attention was
 consumed by botanical and geological matters. Thus, there

⁴⁴Dunlop, op. cit., n.p.

⁴⁵Cooper, Notions, op. cit., p. 330-331.

was little conflict between settlers and tourists with respect to the war against wildlife.

Nevertheless, the settlers' point of view towards wild animals is another element of the context for the tourist's journey across the state of New York. Unlike the native Americans, who competed for land, and the trees, which also competed for land, but were felled as well for fuel, building materials and fencing, the wild animals of upstate New York were pursued under a triple motivation. (1) Their extirpation was believed essential for the protection of young domestic animals. (2) Their pelts had a market and bounties of up to ten dollars were paid for their scalps.⁴⁶ (3) They were frequently used for food and domestic supplies. Venison was a staple. Among birds, crows were hunted as predators, but wild turkeys, passenger pigeons, ducks, geese and other species were not an inconsequential source of nourishment.

Most feared by settlers with domestic animals were wolves and bear. H. H. Lyman reminisced about these two

⁴⁶ Millard F. Roberts, Historical Gazetteer of Steuben County (Syracuse: 1891), p. 17 quotes the following from the minutes of an 1817 meeting of the Steuben County Board of Supervisors: "Resolved that a bounty of \$10.00 be allowed on panther scalps." In Caroline, New York, bounties of \$5.00 were given for a wolf scalp, and \$1.00 for a wildcat scalp. See further William Heidt, Jr. Forests and Farms in Caroline (Ithaca: Dewitt Historical Society of Tompkins County, 1965), p. 16. By the 1830's, Clayton Mau reports that the "total of these rewards might be \$50 or more, a sum sufficiently large to encourage large scale slaughter." (Mau, op. cit., p. 92).

animals, though he considerably reduced the effectiveness of his accusation that wild animals were a nuisance by admitting that fear, especially by women and children was as important a factor as actual danger.

Wild animals were thick, particularly deer and bear, with some wolves and an occasional panther. This interfered with the early raising of pigs and sheep, . . . The wolves were cowardly, and feared only when in packs. But the bear were bolder and more troublesome, and when it came to the raising of young stock, it had to be carefully corralled or penned up each night, and even then the bear occasionally got away with a pig or a lamb. But the actual damage which the wild animals did was nothing in comparison to the fear they inspired in the women and children when left alone. 47

Lyman's memories were echoed by many settlers. Sheep and swine seem to have been menaced by wolves and bear and the predators were virtually eliminated. 48 "By 1830, wolves had become rare, or extinct in much of the western part of the state." 49 Foxes, wildcats and even rodents were also severely reduced. As settlement advanced and the land was put under cultivation, the wild animals, along with the trees and the native Americans,

⁴⁷ Henry Harrison Lyman, Memories of the Old Homestead (Owego, New York: R. J. Oliphant, 1900), p. 12. Lyman was a member of New York State's first Fisheries, Game and Forestry Commission. This book is a collection of "memories" of the early years of the nineteenth century.

⁴⁸ Orsamus Turner, History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase and Morris' reserve. . . . to which is added. . . . the Pioneer History of Monroe County (Rochester, 1851), pp. 191-94.

⁴⁹ Mau, op. cit., p. 92.

were forced either to retreat or to face removal.

The land into which seekers of "natural wonders" travelled west of Albany was remarkably different from the Hudson River Valley. Instead of finding facilities designed for their convenience, travellers found themselves immersed in the confused excitement of a newly settled area still fresh with the scars of victory and without the comforts of civilization. The pioneers had waged a holy war for their very livelihood against the forces of the wilderness, and they had emerged from the experience with an almost crusading zeal to conquer and settle more lands. This changed atmosphere significantly affected the experiences of tourists. While many guidebooks and diaries did not even mention the vanquished, concentrating instead on churches, sites of the Revolution, fashionable ladies and other monuments of civilization, more and more diary space was consumed in evaluating the war between civilization and the wilderness and in interpreting the effects of the conflict for each side.

As we return to the "Fashionable Tour" to examine the images of untamed nature in upstate New York, a different environment emerges. No longer in the Hudson River Valley, we enter a recently settled and cultivated land still dominated by the untamed wilderness. We will discover that the typical romantic response to the lower Hudson River Valley is reserved for specific locations

along the route west, particularly waterfalls, and that most of the wild scenery along the path to Niagara is ignored except for its potential development.

Chapter 6:

From Albany to Trenton Falls

In chapter 5, I identified three wilderness features which made the trip across New York State markedly different from the trip up the Hudson River. Before specific images along the Mohawk River, the Erie Canal and other routes west are discussed, it will be useful to introduce some general images of upstate scenery. Guidebook writers and tourists, Americans and Europeans alike, tended to homogenize their observations and aesthetic predispositions into a general image of upstate New York. Because these images were usually synthesized from specific experiences (except for those established largely on the basis of hearsay and aesthetic fashion), they are relevant background to the discussion of specific scenes.

Much more than those of the Hudson River Valley, the descriptions of upstate New York appear to be miscellaneous and with few connecting links from which one may identify a prevailing aesthetic. This is particularly the case with general impressions of the state in contrast to specific images of recognized natural wonders. While general descriptions fall into broad nationalistic patterns, Romantic and Common Sense sensibilities were often submerged upstate except in the presence of "natural wonders." Thus, as we travel across New York State, we experience tourists reacting to the scenery according to cultural expectations -- virtually ignoring the broad wilderness areas between natural wonders across

the state. For obvious reasons, we too shall concentrate on those natural wonders.

H. D. Gilpin's Northern Tour (1825) exemplifies the characteristic American interpretation of the New World landscape in general and upstate New York in particular. A landscape "fairer and nobler" than any other in existence, the wilderness immediately west of the Hudson was properly created to serve as the foundation for the future happiness of the new society. The modeling of a "just and delightful" civilization onto the highly touted virtues of a pioneer society and the "fast passing. . . . of smiling villages. . . .into lordly cities" was both proclaimed and celebrated. To encourage the transition, "Nature. . . .exerted more than her usual energies, andformed her works on a nobler scale."¹ The barely tapped potential of God's New World as the source of America's present glory and future grandeur was a theme sung by guidebook writers and American tourists across the entire state and nation.

Yet in spite of this rhetoric, much of upstate

¹Henry Dilworth Gilpin, A Northern Tour: Being a Guide to Saratoga Springs, Lake George, Niagara, Canada. . . . Embracing an Account of the Canals, Colleges, Public Institutions, Natural Curiosities, etc. (Philadelphia: H. D. Carey and I. Lea, 1825). Gilpin states that the purpose of A Northern Tour to be "to accompany in some of their excursions, to point out to them those scenes which are worthy of their notice, to revive their recollections on which it is useful and pleasant to dwell, and to afford them at once a memorandum and a guide." (p. 2) This theory of history can fruitfully be compared with that suggested by Thomas Cole in his series of four paintings entitled "The Course of Empire" (1836).

New York remained untouched by civilization during the first half of the nineteenth century, a fact of no little embarrassment to many Americans. Frances Trollope enjoyed a story she heard while riding in a canal boat.

I was much amused by one of our Yankees, who very civilly accompanied our party, pointing out to me the wild state of the country, and apologizing for it, by saying, that the property all around thereabouts had been owned by an Englishman; and you'll excuse me ma'am, but when the English gets a spot of wild ground like this here, they have no notions about it like us; but the Englishman has sold it, and if you was to see it five years hence, you would not know it again; I'll engage there will be by that time, half a score elegant factories -- 'tis a true shame to let such a privilege of water² lie idle.

Some Americans were unable to accept and enjoy the continuing presence of the American wilderness.

Those who did value the wilderness as wilderness were most often persons of means and education. Rev. John Taylor, a pastor in the long-since cultivated lower Connecticut River Valley, had his eye on the future when he labeled the Mohawk Valley a "garden," a term subsequently popularized when the same valley became known as the "garden of America."³ Taylor wondered why Yankees

² Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (2nd ed.: London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Company, 1832), Vol. II, p. 245.

³ John A. Clark, D.D., Gleanings by the Way (Philadelphia: W. J. and J. K. Simon, 1842), p. 179. The Rev. Clark was Rector of St. Andrews Church, Philadelphia. He made the trip into upstate New York in 1837. See also the anonymous "Extracts from an eight-week trip from Albany to the Westward," Mss. dated May, 1815 in the Hill, Atkinson and Fleming Family Papers, Cornell University Archives and Manuscripts #1629, n.p.

"happily situated" in New England "should remove" to New York State. But all doubts were vanquished when he observed a "pleasant situation, . . . excellent land. . . . and a garden [which] must, when opened, and properly tilled, be productive far beyond any of the meadows [sic] on the Connecticut River."⁴ Compare this image with that of Mary Murray, unknown except in name and the fact that she lived fashionably in New York City, who tracked the sublime and the beautiful across New York State in the year that the Erie Canal was opened. One can almost visualize shepherds and their flocks romping in the lush, green fields of her descriptions.

We then with thankful hearts and joyful faces pursued our way through a very fine country, rich and fruitful by the hand of cultivation, and beautiful by Nature who had sweetly varied by soft and undulating lines the peaceful landscape, casting it into hill and dale delightful to the eye and cheering to the heart from the agreeable association of industry, prosperity and contentment, for it seemed to yield everything that could supply the rational wants of man. 5

⁴ John Taylor, Journal of Rev. John Taylor's Tour Through the Mohawk and Black River Counties in 1802 (Contained in E. B. O'Callaghan, Documentary History of New York, Arranged under the direction of Christopher Morgan, Secretary of State (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1850), pp. 671-96), p. 148. The Rev. John Taylor graduated from Yale in 1784, settled in Deerfield, Mass., left the ministry to become a member of the Connecticut legislature. He moved to New York State and finally to Michigan, where he returned to the ministry.

⁵ Mary Murray, "Diary of Trip to Saratoga and Niagara Falls and Back to Saratoga, August 7 - September 12, 1825," Mss. New-York Historical Society, n.p. Mary Murray was the unmarried daughter of John Murray, a Quaker merchant and

In contrast with the Americans John Taylor and Mary Murray, two European ladies summarized their impressions in a slightly different way. Frances Trollope concluded her diary about the Mohawk Valley by reiterating the inadequacy of the pen in image-making and thereby emphasized her preference for particular images as against general impressions.

I have often confessed my conscious incapacity for description, but I must report it here to apologise for my passing so dully through the matchless valley of the Mohawk. I would that some British artist, strong in youthful daring, would take my word for it, and pass over, for a summer pilgrimage through the State of New York. . . . I question whether the world could furnish within the same space, and with equal facility of access, so many subjects for his pencil. Mountains, forests, rocks, lakes, rivers, cataracts, all in perfection. But he must be bold in coloring, or he will make nothing of it. There is a cleanliness of atmosphere, a strength of chiaroscuro, a massiveness in the foliage, and a brilliance of contrast, that must make a colorist of anyone who has an eye. He must have courage to dip his pencil in shadows black as night, and light that might blind an eagle. As I presume my artist to be an enthusiast he must first go directly to Niagara, for even in the Mohawk Valley his pinioned wing may droop. If this fever run very high, he may slake his enthusiasm at Trenton, and while there, he will not dream⁶ of anything beyond it.

Margaret Hunter Hall (usually known as Mrs. Basil Hall) expressed a curious twist to Trollope's confession in

brother of Robert Murray, President of the New York Chamber of Commerce (1798-1806) and Director of the Bank of New York.

⁶Trollope, op. cit., pp. 252-3.

her report of the trip she and her husband took in 1827-28. Mrs. Hall, though less insulting to American readers than her husband, certainly did not extend herself in praising American scenery. She used her allotted space for "critical" purposes.

The scenery on the whole was so enchanting, indeed all my epithets of admiration are completely worn out in this country, and as that strain is always mightily tiresome to the reader, . . . instead of mentioning what is beautiful, I shall only give notice⁷ of when I see anything that is ugly.

An analysis of specific images and natural wonders between Albany and Niagara Falls adds concreteness to these general impressions. Most tourists followed the established route along the Mohawk River Valley as far as Utica and then travelled due west along the Old Indian Trail through the towns of Syracuse, Geneva, Auburn and Rochester. Only two areas warranted side excursions -- Trenton Falls and the Finger Lakes. Waterfalls ("cataracts") and lakes ("sheets of water") were the principal natural wonders between Albany and Niagara.⁸ Forests, trees and mountains, while recognized if they were en route, were not yet able to distract tourists

⁷Margaret Hunter Hall, An Aristocratic Journey: Being the Outspoken Letters of Mrs. Basil Hall Written During a Fourteen Month Sojourn in America, 1827-28, Prefaced and edited by Una Pope-Hennessy (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), p. 45.

⁸Cf. Kaaterskill Falls in Chapter 4, pp. 204-210.

significantly from their primary goal -- Niagara Falls.⁹

⁹Nathaniel Parker Willis summarized the feelings of a generation in his hymn of praise for water. Unpolluted water symbolized the pure untamed wilderness.

Much as I detest water in small quantities,
(to drink) I have a hydromania in the way
of lakes, rivers and waterfalls. It is,
by much, the belle in the family of elements.
Earth is never tolerable unless disguised
in green. Air is so thin as only to be
visible when she borrows drapery of water;
and Fire is so staringly bright as to be
unpleasant to the eyesight: but water!
soft, pure, graceful water! there is no
shape into which you can throw her that she
does not seem lovelier than before. She
can borrow nothing of her sisters. Earth
has no jewels in her lap so brilliant as
her own spraypearls and emeralds; Fire has
no rubies like what she steals from the
sunset; Air has no robes like the grace of
her fine-woven and ever-changing draper of
silver. A health (in wine!) to Water!

Who is there that did not love some
stream in his youth? Who is there in whose
vision of the past there does not sparkle
up, from every picture of childhood, a
spring or a rivulet woven through the
darkened and torn woof of first affections
like a thread of changed silver? How do
you interpret the instinctive yearning
with which you search for the river-side
or the fountain in every scene of nature --
the clinging unaware to the river's
course when a truant in the fields of
June -- the dull void you find in every
landscape of which it is not the ornament
and the center? For myself, I hold with
the Greeks: 'Water is the first principle
of all things: we were made from it, and
we shall be resolved into it. Nathaniel

Parker Willis, Trenton Falls, Picturesque and
Descriptive (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1851), pp. 52-53 .

The long and tiring journey from Albany to Niagara Falls divided naturally into two parts with a major cataract, Trenton Falls, the dividing point. In this chapter, I shall focus on the scenery east of and including Trenton Falls. Here the land was comparatively well developed compared with the rest of upstate New York, for on the banks of the Mohawk River rose such important towns as Schenectady, Rome, Amsterdam, Little Falls and Utica. West of Trenton Falls,¹⁰ the Mohawk River became unsatisfactory as a commercial waterway and the route west proceeded through the low-lying, less developed midriff of the state.

The public transportation schedules served to divide the distance between Albany and Utica into three sections, each of which had an important waterfall. From Albany to Schenectady, Cohoes Falls was the landmark. Little Falls served as both the attraction and the terminus of the second section. Yet next to Niagara Falls, the most important cataract in the state was Trenton Falls, situated twelve bumpy miles north of Utica. The trip from Albany to Utica with three increasingly significant cataracts, was both a taste and a preparation for future waterfalls to come.

T. L. McKenney, whose descriptions of the Hudson River's scenery were unusually complete and lengthy, almost "forgot to mention" the "very beautiful" country around

¹⁰See Chapter 7.

Albany, so busy was he with his transportation problems and so comparatively plain was the scenery. In contrast to those along the Hudson River, he suggested that the mountains appeared

to have grown tired of an upright position, and to have reclined themselves as if for repose, forming a handsome semicircular background to the city. . . .and as they gradually approach the river, they gradually sink 'till they dip into it, interlocking with the east shore. 11

For Frances Wright, the area around Albany was predictably picturesque. The river flowed "placidly through a country finely varied, rich with cultivation," dotted with the brilliant white reflections of "broad roofed cottages and villas, shadowed with trees, and backed with an undulating line of hills." The contrast and alternation of broad vistas, woodlots, the winding river and open fields was a central feature of the picturesque ideal. The uncivilized virgin wilderness remained an awesome presence even in the immediate environment of Albany as late as 1827. There were "few districts throughout the vast country where the forest, or some remnants of it, stood not within the horizon."¹² To the embarrassment of some and the enjoyment of others, the wilderness still defined the boundaries of civilization and remained a challenge to the inhabitants of the New

¹¹Thomas Lorraine McKenney, Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes (Baltimore: F. Lucas, Jr., 1827), p. 47.

¹²Frances Wright, Views of Society and Manners in America, by an Englishwoman (London, 1822), p. 175.

World.

Despite the generally favorable view of Albany as an arcadian oasis surrounded by the wilderness, some tourists complained that the land was a sandy and barren desert.¹³ Throughout western history, the desert as wilderness has evoked memories of temptation, trial, suffering and deprivation. While Americans valued fertile, treeless grasslands, dry and barren lands were met with little enthusiasm.¹⁴ In the New World, the middle landscape -- treeless, yet fertile -- was the ideal landscape.¹⁵

There was little accord regarding the aesthetic or agricultural value of the "Pine Barrens" or the "Albany Desert." In spite of the sandy soil, Prall reported that he "passed through [a] most fertile country."¹⁶ More consistent in their evaluations were an Englishman who in 1824 dismissed the area as "rough and uninviting"¹⁷ and an

¹³David M. Prall, "Journey of a Jaunt from New York to Niagara, July 1821, Kept by David M. Prall of New York City, son of Abraham and Marion Prall" Mss. New-York Historical Society, n.p. Prall lived from 1799-1848.

¹⁴See further Yi-Fu Tuan, "Attitudes Towards Environment: Themes and Approaches," pp. 8-14 in David Löwenthal (ed.), Environmental Perception and Behavior (Chicago: Department of Geography, The University of Chicago, 1967). This item is the Department of Geography Research Paper #109.

¹⁵See further Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). Cf. Chapter 3, p. 160.

¹⁶Prall, op. cit., n.p.

¹⁷Isaac Candler, A Summary View of America: Comprising a Description of the Face of the Country, and of Several of the Principal Cities, and Remarks on the Moral, Social and Political Character of the People: Being the Result of

anonymous traveller whose decision to remain anonymous was prudent given his or her un-American sentiments.

Of all the miserably sterile, sandy, barren wastes that I have ever beheld, not even excepting Mount Misery, it caps the climax. Nor is there a single object to relieve the eye, to interest the traveller, or to merit attention save the uniform straightness of the turnpike. 18

In contrast to these strong criticisms, American Mary Murray was more grateful. The scenery brought to her mind the "Being who conceived, framed, sustained, and adorned such glowing scenery." "Glowing scenery" was so often associated with religiosity that one can only conclude that they were coordinates in the minds of many viewers. When an image met a certain standard of adequacy or sufficiency, thoughts of divinity were triggered in the mind of the viewer. What then was "sufficient" for Mary Murray? She had

a most enchanting ride [by stagecoach] along the banks of the Mohawk, some of the wildest and most picturesque scenery that can be imagined, intermixed with neat cottages, canal boats, etc. . . . The days ride has been altogether delightful; the whole distance along the beautiful banks of the Mohawk; rich with culture, luxuriant with Nature's finest growth diversified with hill and dale,

Observation and Enquiries During A Journey in the United States (London: Printed for T. Caldwell, 1824), p. 4.

18

, Notes of a Tour Through the Western Part of the State of New York in 1829. Two hundred copies reprinted in 1916 from the Ariel, published in Philadelphia in 1829-30. Said copies printed for George P. Humphrey of Rochester, New York. n.p.

rocks, water, woods and fields; there is¹⁹
nothing wanting.

Travellers who looked favorably on the land between Albany and Schenectady often found fault with another aspect of the trip -- the people. While Murray's sentiments were common, the settlers in the valley detracted from the arcadian image inasmuch as they did not exhibit the "pastoral simplicity" of the arcadian ideal. Expectations for an arcadian population conflicted with the reality.

It must be confessed that the Yankee inhabitants are not altogether Arcadians, for though they may have at bottom sterling qualities, they certainly possess no pastoral simplicity, nor have they that native curiosity of manner which distinguishes the mountain peasantry of many²⁰ European nations.

J. Richard Beste was not as disappointed as Dauberry. What Dauberry interpreted as the want of "pastoral simplicity," Beste interpreted positively as "greater animation." Near Albany,

the inhabited country might be a mere track through a desert: but yet the track was all alive. Canal, aqueducts, saw-mills, and smiling villages, connected by log-houses and chalets, gave the whole a look of perhaps greater animation than can be²¹ found in many an old settled country.

¹⁹ Murray, op. cit., n.p.

²⁰ Charles G. B. Dauberry, Journal of a Tour Through the United States and in Canada, made during the years 1837-38. (Oxford: Printed by T. Combe, 1843), p. 17. Dauberry, an Englishman, was Professor of Chemistry and Botany at the University of Oxford.

²¹ J. Richard Beste, The Wabash: or, Adventures of an English Gentleman's Family in the Interior of America (London:

Cohoes Falls, a minor cataract on the Mohawk River just west of its junction with the Hudson River, was the only recognized natural wonder between Albany and Schenectady. It was hardly Niagara! Mary Murray was content with a view of the Falls from a distance, indicating that otherwise, "it would have been two or three miles out of our way to have paid them a visit."²² Frances Wright gave the Falls a similarly unenthusiastic notice.

In this neighborhood, nature presents many beautiful and some grant features; chief among these, is the well-known cataract of the Mohawk, where waters precipitate themselves over a fine wall of rock, just before they unite with those of the Hudson. There are several pleasing falls of water to be found in the hills of the surrounding country, and though in grandeur that of the Mohawk stands pre-eminent, in beauty some may do more than rival it.

Yet in spite of her lukewarm introduction, Wright continues by reflecting on the place of waterfalls in American scenery. This is particularly important given the pre-dominance of water images in early nineteenth century images of the wilderness.

I have frequently been surprised in this vast country, that I have visited, to find, upon a more close examination, wild and romantic features in a landscape whose outline wore a dull character of mild beauty or dull uniformity. Rocky glens, clothed with shaggy wood, and traversed by brawling streams, broken into cascades,

Hurst and Blackett, 1855), two volumes, I, p. 114.

²² Murray, op. cit., n.p.

are not infrequently found in hills,
 rising gently out of vast and swampy plains,
 or skirting valleys, waters by placid
 rivers, whose banks of alluvial soil are
 rich with golden harvests. ²³

Is it surprising that waterfalls attracted the attention they did? For many, they redeemed landscapes of "mild beauty or dull uniformity." They provided contrast, that all important factor in the evaluation of scenery.

Waterfalls were popular also because they brought together in one image the necessary variety and intensity of emotion to awaken the subdued spirituality which characterized early nineteenth century images of the New World's natural wonders in particular and Euro-American scenery in general. Such emotional intensity sparked an outpouring of romantic enthusiasm for the natural wonders of nature which we are likely today to dismiss as mere sentimentalism. The wilderness waterfall, whether beautiful or sublime, almost forced the early nineteenth century viewer to lapse into religious language. In expressing his enthusiasm for waterfalls, Finch was speaking for his nineteenth century travelling colleagues, at least for those who had learned to see in wild nature an example of God's best work.

Scarce any object in nature makes such an impression on the mind as a cataract; we seem in the immediate presence of Deity; for here we see His works unchanged, inimitable by the hand of man. The Cohoes Falls are a quarter of a mile wide, and

²³Wright, op. cit., pp. 168-9.

the precipice is seventy feet high. The face of the rock is in some places much broken. . . .At first it pursued its way to the ocean without anyone [except the native Americans, who did not count] to admire its beauty, or the wildness of its scenery. . . .now the sight of the wooden bridge at a distance shows that civilization has invaded these solitudes and soon 24 will its greatest charms be destroyed.

Cohoes Falls, a series of short falls totalling about sixty feet in height, appeared more like rapids than a cataract. The best view was from a bridge over the river about one-half mile below the falls. From this spot Macauley discovered a whole gamut of aesthetic possibilities, to wit,

romantic and picturesque scenery. . . . The high barriers of rocks which confine the stream, the roar of the cataract, the dashing of troubled waters, as they descend in rapids beneath you, and the striking contrast of the torrent in the wildness of the scenery above, combine in rendering the whole an unusual scene 25 of sublimity.

A further attraction was the Cohoes' "breadth," a "true source of grandeur, particularly as there is nothing in the surrounding scenery to assist the effect."²⁶ On the other hand, some tourists considered "breadth" fortunate,

²⁴Isaac Finch, Travels in the United States of America, Containing Some Account of their Scientific Institutions, and a Few Notions of the Geology and Minerology of those Countries (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman, 1833), p. 68.

²⁵James Macauley, The Natural, Statistical and Civil History of the State of New York, in three volumes (New York: Gould and Banks, 1829), Vol. I, p. 194.

²⁶Wright, op. cit., p. 168.

presumably because the water flowed slower than otherwise.

Macauley found the Falls' setting "romantic and picturesque." Wright found nothing to attract her attention. In another variation, Gilman was distracted by human interference with the raw, untamed grandeur of Nature. She breaks into religious language when the human element is minimized, but she suggests that the "thought of Deity" may be blocked by a human presence which compromises the opportunity for silence and solitude in the wilderness.

The romantic interest of the access is somewhat diminished by the utilitarians who have gathered around it; but when standing in front of the cataract, nothing is visible but the wildness of nature, harmonizing well with its ceaseless flow and ceaseless voice; and, though not absolutely a spectacle of grandeur, yet the thought of Deity, which a waterfall almost necessarily awakens in a reflecting mind, comes over one in solemn reverie. 27

Tourbook descriptions of the Falls were predictably enthusiastic. Their particular function in luring visitors to the Falls resulted in an uncritical zeal which makes it difficult, on the basis of their descriptions, to distinguish one cataract from another. In The Northern Tour, one of the most useful, detailed and least sentimental guides, H. D. Gilpin reports that three miles north of Troy

as we look upstream, the Cohoes Falls are seen in all their magnificence and beauty. In summer, the period of the year in which

27 Caroline Gilman, The Poetry of Travelling in the United States, With additional sketches by a few friends and a week among autographs by Rev. S. Gilman (New York: S. Colman, 1838), p. 81.

they are usually visited, the stream is not full, and instead of one noble cascade formed by the whole of the river, the rock is only partially covered, and separate waterfalls are formed. This circumstance, however, produces a feature of great beauty; for the dark red hue of the rocks which are thus disclosed, is finely contrasted with the silvery whiteness of the stream breaking across them. ²⁸

Davison's tourbook description of the Falls is more typical.

The lofty barrier of rocks which confine the course of the Mohawk -- the distant roar of the cataract -- the dashing waters as they descend in rapids beneath you -- and the striking contrast of the torrent with the solitude of the scenery above, contribute to render the whole an unusual scene of sublimity and grandeur. It was in taking a view of these falls, several years since, that the poet Moore composed one of his best fugitive pieces. Indeed, the scenery and everything connected with this interesting spot, are calculated to afford ample subjects for the poet and the painter. ²⁹

The land immediately west of Schenectady was not as inviting as that to the east. Few travellers made extravagant claims for this area as they did for others in the state. Candler, for example, observed that on the road along the Mohawk River from Schenectady to Little

²⁸Gilpin, op. cit., p. 58. Gilpin also observed Cohoes Falls in winter, but as with the scenery of Pine Orchard, I have chosen not to discuss seasonal variations.

²⁹Gideon Miner Davison, The Fashionable Tour in 1825. An Excursion to the Springs, Niagara, Quebec and Boston (Saratoga Springs: Published by the author, 1825), p. 163. Davison refers to a poem entitled "Written at the Cohos [sic], or Falls of the Mohawk River" by Thomas Moore (1779-1852), who visited the United States and took the Fashionable Tour in 1804. This volume was first published in 1822. Later editions were revised and enlarged under the title: "The Traveller's Guide Through the Middle and Northern States."

Falls, "with rocky hills on one side and water on the other, the prospect is in some parts picturesque, though there is more often a dreariness displeasing to the eye, and repelling to the fancy."³⁰ Fellow Englishman E. T. Coke suggested slyly that the scene, though "well diversified with hills and rich meadows of Indian corn," improved towards Little Falls and began to "have some claim to the picturesque." In an outburst of Anglochauvinism, Coke also claimed that no part of the scene, "although very pretty," could "vie with Matlock in Derbyshire." Selected scenes "would form a pretty sketch, but nothing to warrant the overdrawn descriptions" which the guidebook he used was offering.³¹ On occasion, Coke saw "some beauty in the vast and endless forests which encircled" him, yet the closed-in feeling of the wilderness in contrast to the civilized openness of the cultivated English countryside he found uncomfortable. When he "again dived into the dark, thick pine forest, whose ragged branches and tall straight trunks had but a few minutes before formed so fine a contrast against the lighter foliage of some other natives of the genre, all signs of civilization disappeared."³² Only Frances Trollope expressed enthusiasm for the distance from

³⁰ Candler, op. cit., p. 4.

³¹ Edward Thomas Coke, A Subaltern's Furlough; Descriptive of Scenes in Various Parts of the United States, Upper and Lower Canada, New-Brunswick and Nova Scotia, during the summer and autumn of 1832 (New York: J. J. Harper, 1833), in two volumes, I, p. 208.

³² Ibid., Vol. II, p. 10.

Schenectady to Utica.

I really cannot conceive that any country can furnish a drive of ninety-six miles more beautiful, or more varied in its beauty. The road follows the Mohawk River, which flows through scenes changing from fields, waving with plenty, to rocks and woods; gentle slopes, covered with cattle, are divided from each other by precipices 500 feet high. ³³

All was not as bad as British, Irish and other European travellers would have us believe. On the contrary, Americans viewed the landscape between Schenectady and Utica as some of the finest scenery in all of New York State. Mary Murray did

not believe the United States could furnish another ride of the same content, possessing such a combination of attractions for the traveller; the whole distance from Schenectady to Utica is through a charming, luxuriant countryside with wooded nature and cultivated, an excellent Turnpike Road, which allows the full enjoyment of the beautiful and picturesque scenery, continually presenting itself with evervarying charms. . . . Here you behold nature in her excellent robes, decked out in her most graceful garments, alluring admirers by the thousand little vagaries, which keep alive the interest she excites; and suffers not the eye to wander from her charms. ³⁴

Rev. Benjamin Dorr, who made several trips through the Mohawk Valley by stage and by boat, felt the same way. In spite of an "extremely hot day, a crowded stage, and dusty road," which "prevented" him from enjoying the scenery of the Mohawk, he felt that what he missed was "perhaps equal in richness and beauty, to any other in the

³³Trollope, op. cit., p. 250.

³⁴Murray, op. cit., n.p.

state." The boat he travelled on another trip was "airy and comfortable," allowing him to see scenery "everywhere beautiful and in some places strickingly [sic] grand."³⁵ DeWitt Clinton, who knew New York State better than most persons of his day, was brief and concise in his judgment of the area. It was "sublime."³⁶

Reasons for the differences in American and European images are not hard to find. One element of the scene particularly repelled European travellers, the same element that Gideon Davison recalled with lively interest. Large and small hills, which appeared as piles of granite and limestone boulders, did not fit the European ideal, while Americans were infected with them as symbols of power and majesty. For Americans, "rudeness" did not imply imperfect creation as it did for many Europeans, but an equally significant, if different, display of divine magnificence. From the Erie Canal,

The view afforded of mountain scenery. . . . is highly interesting and sublime. Which ever way the eye is turned, it rests on huge masses of granite and limestone, piled in heaps. These rocks in some places rise to a great height almost perpendicular, presenting a bleak dark surface, unbleached by the thousand storms which have beat upon them; others present a rugged and uneven face, crowned and overhung by dark evergreens, dipping their verdure into the foaming torrent below; the fissures between others

³⁵ Benjamin Dorr, "A Journal of Tours (1819-1864)" Mss. Cornell University Archives and Manuscripts, p. 5. Dorr lived from 1796 to 1869.

³⁶ William W. Campbell, The Life and Writings of DeWitt Clinton (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849), p. 38.

of these huge piles produce hickory, maple and other trees, which hang from them, and with their sombre shadow deepen the gloomy darkness of the rocks from which they spring; whilst the scanty soil upon others gives life and penurious nourishment to dwarf oaks and vegetation peculiar to similar inhospitable regions. In this scene, where the rude but magnificent works of Nature are so profusely displayed, the imagination is overpowered in their sublimity, and the proudest works of man, and man himself, lose their importance. 37

Americans were excited by this region of the Mohawk for another reason suggested by Jephtha Simms' description of Sir William Johnson's house near Johnstown.

The cottage was painted white, with the corners, doors, window casings, and columns painted green, as was the English taste of the times -- the whole contrasting beautifully with the wild scenery around. 38

Here is an important clarification of the ideal of the middle landscape -- that precarious balance between the primitive simplicity of the wilderness and the urbane sophistication of "high" civilization. Stark and vivid contrasts, in this case between a "cottage painted. . . .

³⁷ Davison, op. cit., pp. 203-4.

³⁸ Jephtha Simms, Trappers of New York or a Biography of Nicholas Stoner and Nathaniel Foster; together with Anecdotes of other Celebrated Hunters, and some account of Sir William Johnson and His Style of Living (Albany: Printed by J. Munsell, 1850), p. 36. William Johnson (1715-1774), Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the English Crown during a good part of his life, played a key role in the history of upstate New York white settlement. In his later years, he led the life of a manorial lord from an estate on the banks of the Mohawk called Johnson Hall. Though the "hall" is not large by modern standards, referring to it as a "cottage" is an understatement. Jephtha Simms' works on the early history of the Adirondacks reserves for him an important place in the historiography of upstate New York.

as was the English taste" and "wild scenery" were valued by Americans. While it is true that Europeans appreciated variety in the picturesque ideal, they preferred what they interpreted as the subtle, soft, and soothing contrasts of a controlled and civilized Europe. The European picturesque ideal naturally included contrasts which were hewn to conform with their cultural traditions. The rough, stark and vivid contrasts of the untamed, raw wilderness did not conform. Yet it is also true that on both sides of the Atlantic, a balance between contrasting aesthetic events was important, even if it is impossible to identify any uniform standard. Generally speaking, the European ideal was more delicate than its American counterpart, even though each viewer ultimately served as his or her own judge in determining a proper balance between aesthetic events.

Simms identified only the necessity of balancing contrasting aesthetic events. James Fenimore Cooper went further. In Cooper's 1828 compilation of New York images, the narrator looked east from a height of land about fifty miles west of Albany and claimed to see a "view which resembled none he had ever seen before." There was a specific reason for his enchantment.

It was completely an American scene, embracing all that admixture of civilization, and of the forest, of the works of man, and of the reign of nature, that one can so easily imagine to belong to this country. There was perhaps an equal distribution of field and forest. The latter term is not, however, the

best, since it was a constant succession of open land and wood, in proportion which, without being exactly, was surprisingly equal. 39

Cooper emphasizes the importance of a balance between civilization and wilderness by identifying two colors, a cool green and a warm yellow, with the contrasting elements of the scene. In a style Donald Ringe has called the "pictorial mode,"⁴⁰ Cooper gives value to colors, making them symbols of both civilization and wilderness.

The dark green shadows are produced by the foliage of a wood, reserved, perhaps, for the use of half a dozen farms, and lying in a body, (some common objection to culture influencing that number of proprietors to select adjacent ground for their reservations), and the fields of golden yellow, or of various shades and hues, are produced by the open fields. The distance diminished the objects to the eye, and brings the several parts so much in union. 41

After considerable description of these farms from the idyllic perspective of the height on which the narrator rested, Cooper associates the scene with America's "moral" destiny. Continental travellers had repeatedly criticized the American landscape for its "want of historical association."⁴² At times, even Cooper fell prey to the

³⁹James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor in two volumes (London: Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street, 1828), Vol. I, p. 332.

⁴⁰Donald A. Ringe, The Pictorial Mode: Space and Time in the Art of Bryant, Irving and Cooper (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1971).

⁴¹Cooper, op. cit., p. 333.

⁴²Recall my discussion of this theme with reference to the Hudson River. See chapter 3.

tendency to find American scenery lacking in this respect. At other times (and this is one of them), his seemingly negative comments were merely a rhetorical flourish to introduce an extended rebuttal of the European critique. In this case, he puts it in the mouth of "Cadwallader," perhaps based on Cadwallader David Colden (1769-1834), Mayor of New York (1818-1820) and grandson of John Bartram's friend and benefactor, Cadwallader Colden.⁴³ Cadwallader speaks to a European visitor.

'You complain of the absence of association to give its secret, and perhaps greatest charm which such a sight is capable of inspiring. You complain unjustly. The moral feelings with which a man of sentiment and knowledge looks upon the plains of your hemisphere, is connected with his recollections: here it should be mingled with his hopes. The same effort of the mind is as equal to the one as to the other. . . . The spectator on moral things can enjoy a satisfaction here, that he who wanders over the plains of Greece will seek in vain. The pleasure of the latter, if he be wise and good, is unavoidably tinged with melancholy regrets; while here all that reason allows may be hoped for in behalf of man. . . . We live in the excitement of a rapid and constantly progressive condition. The impetus of society is imparted to all its members and we advance because we are not⁴⁴ accustomed to stand still.

In spite of European disenchantment, Americans found the scenery west of Schenectady to be just the right contrast between civilization and wilderness. Furthermore, the middle landscape of the New World pointed Americans to a

⁴³See chapter 2.

⁴⁴Cooper, *op. cit.*, pp. 334-7.

future unavailable to Europeans burdened by associations of the past.

The principal scenic attractions of the journey between Schenectady and Little Falls was a cataract named Little Falls. At Little Falls, the Mohawk River plunged about forty feet in the course of a mile, giving more the impression of rapids than of falls. The steeply sided granite gorge was "a very romantic one which art has made more so, by the magnificent canal aqueduct which crosses the stream."⁴⁵ Disturnell took every occasion to note that Little Falls was "much resorted to by the admirers of nature and art technology."⁴⁶ Gilpin also made the same observation. After identifying several geological features -- names of rocks and patterns of sedimentation -- he turned his

attention to the scenery of the spot, the beauties of nature and the beauties of art. The native scenery is wild and striking: the river, pent in by rugged and fantastic rocks, seems to have formed for itself a trench through them. Huge

⁴⁵ John Disturnell, Springs, Waterfalls, Sea-bathing Resorts and Mountain Scenery in the United States and Canada (New York: J. Disturnell, 1855), p. 96.

⁴⁶ John Disturnell, The Traveller's Guide to the Hudson River, Saratoga Springs, Lake George, Falls of Niagara, and Thousand Islands; Montreal, Quebec, and the Saguenay River; also, to the Green and White Mountains, and other parts of New England; forming the Fashionable Northern Tour Through the United States and Canada with Maps and Embellishments (New York: Published by the American News Company, 1864), p. 76. John A. Kouwenhoven has discussed the importance of "vernacular" or technological art in American life and culture, but he does not sufficiently emphasize artful technology as an element of the landscape. See further John A. Kouwenhoven, The Arts in Modern American Civilization (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1948).

and misshapen fragments of granite are heaped upon each other, overgrown and interspersed with maple, elm, hemlock, and pine; the water foams and roars amid the interstices, while above them it flows silently and placidly along. . . .Of late years, art has been added to her attractions.

Then in familiar language, Gilpin again molds the notion of association to a particularly American image, in subtle contrast to the "ordinary" European meaning.

To the contemplative wanderer, who looks down upon these plains, associations must be strange; he will indeed be struck by the vicissitudes of things, not on the narrow scale in which the ordinary things of the world would strike him, but on the vast scale which Nature presents, when we compare her works, after long and distant 47 periods of time.

Romantic European travellers expressed less interest in structural considerations, geologic or geographic. Frances Trollope wrote fondly of Little Falls with a

character of beauty as singular as it is striking. . . .the stream appears to run in a much narrower channel than it once occupied, and the space which it seems formerly to have filled is now covered with bright green herbage save that, at intervals, large masses of rock arise abruptly from the level turf; these are crowned with all such trees as love and the scanty diet which rock affords. Dwarf oaks, cedars, and the mountain ash, are grouped in a hundred ways among them; each clump you look upon is lovelier than its 48 neighbor; I never saw so sweetly wild a spot.

⁴⁷ Gilpin, op. cit., pp. 95-6. Frances Wright was such a "contemplative wanderer." The "wild scene" helped her "image out the uproar that must in former days have raged in the depth of the pass below." The "operations of time" were solemn ages, moments, and "all the course of time a span." (Wright, op. cit., p. 178.)

⁴⁸ Trollope, op. cit., pp. 250-1.

C. D. Arfwedson condescended that the beauty of Little Falls "would be a subject of admiration even in Switzerland." He arrived by stagecoach one morning at sunrise and immediately proclaimed that "few spots in America [were] so romantic as this." After several surprisingly acute geological observations and notes on the trees that grew out of the rock crevices, Arfwedson seems particularly excited by the

huge wall, in appearance resembling one rock piled upon another. The rocks are here very singular, being almost perpendicular, with uneven and smooth sides. . . . To the right rushed, in wild confusion, between detached stones, the river, still foaming after the Fall; and on the other side of it rose a wall of rocks, as sterile as that which follows the course 49 of the canal.

Both Trollope and Arfwedson isolate elements in the scene which they identify as "wild" -- the randomness of "large masses of rock" covered with clumps of foliage for one, and the river rushing between "detached stones" for the other. While natural abandon was certainly central to the images of these persons, a structural feature which the guidebooks described in greater detail, is perhaps more important. Little Falls is an excellent example of a "cross valley," a term given to streams or rivers that cross ridges or mountains. Invariably "wild" because the

⁴⁹ C. D. Arfwedson, The United States and Canada, in 1832, 1833, and 1834, in two volumes (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1834), Vol. II, p. 228. See also Beste, op. cit., pp. 114-5 for another comparison to Swiss scenery.

valley is narrow and the river current speeded, the rough walls and rocky debris are scars of gigantic earth movements, upheaval and destruction. The slopes or walls are too steep to cultivate and are often covered with forest. In spite of primitive geological knowledge, tourists were remarkably sensitive to extraordinary formations and readily identified Little Falls as a "cross valley."

T. L. McKenney, for example, summarized Little Falls as

grand, whilst the desolation of the rocks, and the broken up mountains, are enough to impress one with the belief that it was the outlet or vent of some awful and interior convulsion of nature; or what is more likely, that here the Mohawk broke over, and caused all this tumult in the rage and fury of its passage. 50

The cross valley or water gap was closely associated with the discovery of American scenery in the first half of the nineteenth century. In New England, in the middle states, in the new west, and in the old south, water gaps precipitated interest in the general scenery. Examples are manifest -- one need only think of the Catskills,⁵¹ the Connecticut River Valley in southern Massachusetts separated by Mount Tom and Mount Holyoke, Franconia and Crawford Notches in the White Mountains of

⁵⁰McKenney, op. cit., p. 54. Paul Shepard, Jr. further suggests the structure of the cross valley by listing four geological causes. "They result from at least four situations: from the overflow of a basin, from being gently lowered across a buried ridge as a stream removes materials by erosion, from the stream's capacity to maintain its position from erosion into the hillside until the crest of the hill is notched." See further, Paul Shepard, Jr., "The Cross-Valley Syndrome," Landscape, Vol. X, #3, p. 4.

⁵¹See my discussion of Timothy Dwight at Kaaterskill Falls in the Catskills, chapter 2.

New Hampshire, the Delaware Water Gap, and other passes along the whole length of the Appalachians. Cross valleys were valued for three principal reasons, if Little Falls is typical. (1) Little Falls unleashed a subdued spirituality. (2) It satisfied formal aesthetic requirements of sublimity and beauty. (3) It was unusual enough to be recognized as a "natural wonder." In each case, as we have seen, a language of religiousness was used to express the reactions of tourists. Arfwedson provides another remarkable example of a tourist's subdued spirituality emerging in the attempt to understand his feelings about Little Falls. Although he resorts to the third person, there can be little doubt that he speaks of his experience.

His soul is raised to regions which the
pestiferous vapors of the earth seldom
permit him to behold. He is a renovated
being, with nobler sentiments, purer 52
emotions, and loftier ideals.

Fanny Kemble shared a similar experience. She arrived at Little Falls at dawn. But in contrast to Arfwedson, she employs formal aesthetic language to explain her heightened feelings at the Falls.

The dewey earth was beginning to smile in
the red dawn, when we approached Little
Falls, a place where the placid, gentle
character of the Mohawk becomes wild and
romantic, and beautifully picturesque. . . .
It was exceedingly beautiful (the banks,
bold and high, were crowned with tangled
woods and gemmed with wild flowers, and
the delicate vivid tufts of ferns); and
though I believe I missed some parts of
the scenery immediately surrounding Little

⁵² Arfwedson, op. cit., p. 289.

Falls, the approach to it, which is of the same nature, enchanted me extremely.⁵³

British travellers were not only enthusiastic about Little Falls, but were hardly reluctant to express themselves. Americans, on the other hand, not well versed in romantic expression and less sure of their images, were not inclined to extend themselves over what was admittedly a minor cataract. They reserved their romantic fervor for what they were sure deserved their acclaim. Richard H. Dana, Jr. (1815-1882), lawyer extraordinary and author of Two Years Before the Mast (1840), journeyed through the Mohawk Valley several times on behalf of the Saturday Club of Concord. He praised, then dismissed Little Falls as "the most beautiful place" he saw during one day of travel.

I never saw a more picturesque situation. The whole valley of the Mohawk is full of beauty, but no village has so romantic a site as this.⁵⁴

An equally famous colleague was similarly brief. DeWitt Clinton observed in 1810 only that the "Little Falls are the Highlands in miniature, and the Mohawk here, ought to be considered as the Hudson, forcing its way through the mightiest obstacle of nature."⁵⁵

⁵³Fanny Kemble, Journal, 1832-1834 in two volumes (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1835), Vol. II, p. 246.

⁵⁴Richard H. Dana, Jr., The Journal of Richard Henry Dana, Jr. in three volumes. Edited by Robert F. Lucid (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), Vol. I, p. 307.

⁵⁵Campbell, op. cit., p. 44. This is from the diary entry dated July 8, 1810.

Despite the generally positive reception of Little Falls by travelling public, there was dissent. E. T. Coke, famous for his sour attitude towards American natural wonders, looked askance at both those who praised and the object of their praise.

I have heard so much of it that I stepped out of the boat at the first lock, half a mile from the first village, not only for the purpose of viewing, but of sketching some of this far famed scenery, and walked past it all, momentarily expecting to come upon some thing excessively grand and sublime, so much had I been deceived by exaggerated descriptions! 56

Coke's dismissal would have been understandable later in the century, for Little Falls was one of the first natural wonders in upstate New York to be invaded by the wheels of progress. As late as 1840, Little Falls was advertised as "situated on both sides of the Mohawk River in a most romantic setting," yet shortly thereafter "gave up being picturesque" as industry increasingly took advantage of the water power that the Falls naturally provided. As the fashionable English learned through bitter experience, mills and factories seriously compromised the reigning aesthetic ideal. By 1840, Little Falls could boast of a "wooden factory, 3 paper mills, 1 machine shop, 1 distillery, 1 brewery, 3 flour mills, 2 plaster factories, 1 trip hammer, 4 furnaces, 1 falling mill, 1 sash factory."⁵⁷ The winds of change were sweeping the Mohawk Valley, but

⁵⁶Coke, op. cit.

⁵⁷Codman Hislop, The Mohawk (New York: Rinehart, 1948), p. 255.

blew only a hint of things to come.

Since it was similar to the environment between Albany and Little Falls, the area between Little Falls and Utica was one of the fastest growing regions in the new country during the first half of the nineteenth century. The wilderness, except for occasional cataracts, remained depressingly familiar and therefore was not as impressive as the newly cultivated fields. We may summarize this distance with the image of William Darby, a remarkably perceptive American tourist with an unusual visual independence. Balancing uncritical enthusiasm and outright disparagement, from a hilltop he saw

at the extreme brow a large farm exposed to full view of the city of Utica, the vicinity, and the valley of the Mohawk to the farthest limit of vision. . . .As I stood and gazed upon this noble prospect, I could not avoid exclaiming mentally 'that I had seen many more sublime views, many more grand, that so completely answered to my conceptions of the truly soft and beautiful landscape.' Certainly I had more than a thousand farms spread before me, many hundreds could be seen at one glance. . . .That mind must be void of the least sympathies of human nature, who could behold this fine prospect, without feeling a strong sensation of pleasure. Gratifying indeed must be the reflection upon the sum of domestic peace, plenty, tranquility, affection and comfort, enjoyed⁵⁸ within its limits.

Trenton Falls was fifteen miles north of Utica.

Off the beaten westward path, it was protected longer

⁵⁸William Darby, A Tour from the City of New York to Detroit (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, American Classics Series, 1962), pp. 57-58. This volume was originally published in 1819. The tour took place from May 2 to September 22, 1818.

from the industrial fate of Little Falls. "In the long corridor of travel between New York and Niagara, Trenton Falls was a sort of alcove aside -- a side scene out of earshot of the crowd -- a recess in a window whither you draw a friend by the button for the sake of a chit-chat at ease."⁵⁹ Because of its location, it became, to Nathaniel Parker Willis' sheer delight, a summer resort with a different and decidedly more select clientele than the Falls along the Mohawk River itself. Tourists had to make a special effort to reach Trenton Falls. Even so, during the summer of 1883, Fanny Kemble reported in uncharacteristically reserved language that "there was a constant succession" of visitors, most of whom, she was appalled to note, appeared "quite satisfied with an hour's stroll." Some "alighted from their carriage, dined, sauntered around the house, and without even going down to the river,"⁶⁰ returned to the Mohawk Valley to assume their place in the "general procession west."⁶¹

Late in the second decade of the nineteenth century, Frances Trollope claimed that Trenton Falls had "become within the past few years second in fame only to Niagara."⁶² Trollope was correct. In spite of what

⁵⁹Nathaniel Parker Willis, Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive, with an original essay by John Sherman, first resident (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851), p. 54.

⁶⁰Kemble, op. cit., pp. 255-6.

⁶¹Willis, op. cit.

⁶²Trollope, op. cit., p. 215.

appears to be a weak reception by tourists, Trenton Falls became the most important natural wonder in central New York State not by default, but due largely to the journalistic design of Nathaniel Parker Willis (1806-1867), a fashionable dilettante who preferred Trenton Falls to all other "Rural Resorts." Willis preserved his praise in Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive, in which he also reprinted an extended description of the Falls by John Sherman. Trenton Falls was the only Falls in New York State other than Niagara worthy of a book devoted exclusively to its history and attractions.⁶³

There was no regularly scheduled public transportation along the "execrable road to Trenton Falls."⁶⁴ Arfwedson claimed that the road was the "worst in America," citing as evidence the "broken down vehicles and begrimed faces" which he passed en route.⁶⁵ Yet the "unpleasantness of the proceeding" was mollified somewhat by the "very beautiful country."⁶⁶ Again, its beauty was due to the

⁶³ Willis, op. cit.

⁶⁴ Richard Cobden, The American Diaries of Richard Cobden, edited with an introduction and notes by Elizabeth Hoon Cawley (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952). Cobden travelled in the United States in 1835 and 1859. I refer only to the 1835 diary, p. 110.

⁶⁵ Arfwedson, op. cit., p. 293.

⁶⁶ Edward Strutt Abdy, Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America from April 1833 to October 1834 (London: John Murray, 1835), Vol. I, p. 330. Abdy was a Fellow of Jesus College at the University of Cambridge, England.

proper combination of "cultivated and well-wooded country."⁶⁷ Fanny Kemble also noted a "fair" or proper balance.

The country was all smiling round us in rich beauty; the ripening sheets of waving grain; the sloping fields, with here and there the grey tomb-stone of a forest tree; the vivid thickets bounding the pale harvest plots; the lines relieved against the dark woods. . . .was all lovely. 68

Kemble's experience of the scenery and road between Utica and Trenton was "beautiful and bad." She dreaded the "dark drive back through these miry and uneven ways."⁶⁹ Beaufoy characterized the route more positively before introducing his reader (and us) to the vicinity of the Falls.

There are several commodious taverns along the road, and civilization is making great strides in every direction of what was very recently a wilderness. . . .The Falls are in the woods, where, to my astonishment, I found a hotel containing every comfort and luxury that may attract the summer tourists. 70

Trenton Falls, more than any other cataract in the

⁶⁷ Charles Augustus Murray, Travels in North America, 1834-1836 (London: R. Bentley, 1839), Vol. I, pp. 62-3. Charles Murray was a member of the British Court, as Queen Victoria's master of household. Later on he was a minister and privy councillor. Curiously, he went native while visiting in America and lived for a time with the Pawnee Indians.

⁶⁸ Kemble, op. cit., p. 248.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 209.

⁷⁰ Beaufoy, Tour Through Parts of the United States and Canada by A British Subject (London: Longmans, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1828), p. 54.

northeast, was launched on its public career by the foresight and daring of one man. John Sherman (1772-1828), the first Unitarian pastor in upstate New York, was called to a small parish at Oldenbarneveld in 1806, and with this, started his love affair with Trenton Falls.

Words could only be an apology for the impression of the scene on his mind, he never dreaming there was such a unique display so absolutely unknown, and yet so near the habitation of man.

In 1822, Sherman build a "rural Resort" at the Falls "for the accommodation of visitors." He moved his family there in 1823, and to supplement further his modest clerical income, built a "large addition" in 1825. The demands of pastoring and innkeeping, both of which he perceived as the care of souls, were heavy. He died in 1828. For three years he had served two congregations, local and fashionable, all the while an "agreeable and intelligent host, scholar and friendly gentleman" who "charmed and pleased the intellectual traveller and worshipper of the sublimest works of the Creator."⁷¹

Visitors to Trenton Falls were often surprised by their first view. Surrounded by a peaceful, rolling countryside, the fast flowing river seemed to appear from nowhere. Tourist guidebooks, as with other natural wonders, provide the best index of fashionable reaction to the Falls. Although each guide emphasized somewhat different aspects of the scenery, they all agreed that the

⁷¹Willis, op. cit., pp. 7-10.

wild, secluded and primeval aspect of the place serves greatly to heighten the effect of the striking spectacle presented by the stream; and the whole is so deeply embosomed in the primitive forest that no token of the long and deep gorge through which the waters rush is visible, until you are on its very brink. 72

Earlier, Disturnell had suggested that the "primeval appearance of all around. . . constituted the great charm of the Falls,"⁷³ a position echoed by Nelson who theorized that "cataracts are largely dependent on their entourage for the emotions they excite, which partake of the sublime or the merely pleasing, according as it is wild and grand, or of a more gentle character."⁷⁴ Goodrich suggested that the "wild tracts. . . absorb the wonder of the traveller," and summarized his description of the Falls with a fervor unequalled in the tourbook literature on this natural wonder.

Trenton Falls are too much to be omitted by the traveller in search of amusement, that has the least pretension to correct taste, and that follows in the footsteps of his predecessors in this fashionable route. . . . Those that come this far. . . . should. . . . make their pilgrimage to this shrine. . . . The sensations awakened

⁷² Disturnell, Traveller's Guide, op. cit., p. 79.

⁷³ John Disturnell, A Gazetteer of the State of New York: Comprising its Topography, Geology, Mineralogical Resources, Civil Divisions, Canals, Railroads, and Public Institutions: Together with General Statistics; the Whole Alphabetically Arranged. . . . (Albany: J. Disturnell, 1842), p. 397.

⁷⁴ _____, Nelson's Illustrated Guide to the Hudson and Its Tributaries (New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1860), p. 196.

in a lively and ardent imagination, and the unmingled gratification derived by the spectator when the glories of this exquisite spectacle break upon his view, will for a time absorb him in silent astonishment, and leave nothing more to wish for, so near is it to perfection. The traveller will at first be so overpowered by what he beholds, that it is pardonable if he should question if there can be on earth an exhibition of falling water equal or superior; but when his gust of feeling is over, he may subsequently have reason to change or modify this opinion as he travels farther and sees more, giving all the due meed of praise, but even then when he reverts to Trenton Falls in afterlife, the impression it first made upon his mind is strong and enduring -- perhaps unrivalled. ⁷⁵

Trenton Falls comprised "six distinct cascades" in a two-mile gorge along the West Canada Creek. Most descriptions of the "falls" concentrate on this stretch of gorge. There were two principal falls, High Falls with a drop of about one hundred feet, "the angriest down-fall of water possible,"⁷⁶ and Sherman's Falls, of about forty feet. The other falls each fell approximately twenty feet. With rapids and high walls of shale and limestone on either side of the river, the total effect was of a fast rushing and powerful force of water tumbling out of the apparently placid river above into a wide valley below. As an added attraction, the shale bed was full of the fossilized remains of a previous age, lending to much speculation of a quasi-palaeontological nature.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ A. T. Goodrich, The North American Tourist (New York: A. T. Goodrich, 1839), pp. 53-4.

⁷⁶ Willis, op. cit., p. 8.

⁷⁷ See James Ellsworth DeKay, "Observations on the Structure

Nelson highlights the dangers attendant in visiting the Falls. The wet and slippery roots crossing the path discouraged many "ladies" from walking as far as they might have wished. The stream beneath "rages, foams, and roars, driving with resistless fury, and forcing a tortuous passage." At one point in the walk, tourists passed

a furious winding rapid, which, encroaching on the path, drives the visitor close under a low projecting cliff that compels him to stoop, and seems to demand homage as a prerequisite to admission to the splendid scenery just beyond. Here all ages and sexes bow, who would pass from the portico into the grand temple of Nature's magnificence, to witness the display of her sublimest glories. 78

In the midst of this vivid description, Nelson reverts to the standard refrain, claiming that his pencil only "portrays the outline, but Nature reserves to herself the prerogative of giving to her visitors the rapturous impression."⁷⁹ At the conclusion of this two mile walk, Nelson felt "braced. . . .by healthful exposure to the breezes of heaven," having "feast[ed his] eyes on some of

of Trilobites and Descriptions of an Apparently New Genus, with Notes on the Geology of Trenton Falls by Professor James Renwick" Annals of the Lyceum of Natural History, Vol. I (September, 1823), pp. 174-89. The Lyceum of Natural History was later changed to the New York Academy of Sciences. The date of this study indicates that geological curiosity at Trenton Falls began early. It continued during the whole of the nineteenth century.

⁷⁸Nelson's Guide, op. cit., pp. 195-7.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 198.

the grandest and most beautiful scenery to be found in the world. Enlarged minds and enlivened virtues" necessarily followed.⁸⁰

One might assume that Nelson's tourbook description of the virtues of Trenton Falls was a clever and original exercise in public relations. Clever, yes; original, no. Nelson virtually copied his description of the Falls from one written by John Sherman, owner of the land adjacent to the Falls and proprietor of the "Rural Resort." Until 1851, when Nathaniel Parker Willis published Sherman's single most important and subsequently popular account of Trenton's history and scenery,⁸¹ this 1827 description was not generally known. But under Willis' imprimatur, it was broadcast throughout fashionable circles and became so popular that Nelson used it as copy in his guidebook!

Willis' description of Trenton Falls and his reprint of Sherman's essay are the most important images of Trenton Falls. Willis gives a brief rationale for his book, similar to that which could also be found in many guidebooks.

Trenton Falls is the place, above all others, where it is a luxury to stay -- which one oftenest revisits -- which one must commend strangers to be sure to see. . . .The object of this book is as much to remind the public of what is within easy access and worth their while to know of and frequent, as to

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 201.

⁸¹ Willis, op. cit.

embody a convenient guide and companion in which the visitor shall find directions for his feet and sympathy for his heart. The first thing wanted, of course, is information as to locality, accessibility, situation of the various points of interest,⁸² and accommodation to travellers.

Sherman provided precisely "the first thing wanted," even though the necessary information was embellished with untold romantic allusions. Sherman was not reluctant to display his excitement. In 1827, he claimed that "thousands" annually visited the Falls, a scenery "altogether unique in its character, as combining at once the sublime,⁸³ the romantic and the magnificent."

Sherman, like many who wrote about Trenton Falls, begins his essay by describing the scenery of the two mile walk down the gorge. From the bank above the water, he climbs down to the rushing stream and slips into second person.

You have passed into a subterranean world. The first impression is astonishment at the change. But recovering instantly, your attention is forthwith attracted to the magnificence, the grandeur, the beauty, and the sublimity of the scene. You stand and pause. You behold the operations of incalculable ages. You are thrown back to antediluvian times.⁸⁴

Sherman's surprisingly objective and straightforward analysis of the geological structure is interrupted by an account of someone who feared to go further and

⁸² Ibid., p. 4.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 13.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

turned back, passing references to the power of water, and a phantom Fairy who "makes her appearance at a certain hour of sunshine, and dances through the mist." Sherman's essay is a crescendo of praise which climaxes in his conclusion that the Falls "overpowers man's feeble frame with the paralyzing impression of Omnipotence." He suggests that the "Rural Resort," besides being a place for the general tourist, is a place where the "philosopher and the divine may make their sage remarks and draw their grave conclusions."⁸⁵

Curiously, Willis omitted two crucial sentences in his reprint of Sherman's essay in which Sherman disavows any special insight into romantic scenery or any desire to describe the indescribable. Sherman pleaded (and Willis ignored),

Forgive me, Nature! I have merely attempted to illustrate my own impressions. Others I know are far more sensible to thy charms, and far more competent to minister in the gorgeous palace of thy praise. 86

Other writings support the conclusion that Willis was more interested in fashion than anything else -- that professions to the contrary, his aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities were only skin deep. This in spite of his lament that his situation in the "long gulf of beauty. . . .

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 17-23.

⁸⁶ John Sherman, A Description of Trenton Falls, Oneida County, New York (Utica: W. Williams, 1830), and (New York: W. H. Colyer, 1847). The first edition was in 18 pages; the second in 23 pages. This is the volume reprinted in Willis, Ibid.

[is] as full of wonder as my poor brain jug can anyway hold without spilling.⁸⁷

Willis supplements Sherman's early description of Trenton Falls with some observations of his own. Sherman had sidestepped the problem of categorizing Trenton Falls as either sublime (grand) or beautiful by calling it both, finding its uniqueness in the combination of different aesthetic experiences. Willis was not so circumspect and decided in favor of beauty.

Most people talk of the sublimity of Trenton, but I have haunted it by the week together for its mere loveliness. The river, in the heart of that fearful chasm, is the most varied and beautiful assemblage of the thousand forms and shapes of running water that I know in the world. The Falls, though beautiful, are only peculiar from the dazzling and unequalled rapidity with which the waters come to the leap. 88

Willis does echo Sherman by suggesting that the "peculiarity of Trenton Falls. . . .consists a good deal in the space in which you are compelled to see them." In particular, "the appreciation of power and magnitude [is] somewhat heightened by the confinement of the place."⁸⁹ Yet Sherman concluded from this that Trenton Falls was not subject to the usual aesthetic categorization which Willis seems quite willing to make.

Although "confinement" heightened the effect of

⁸⁷ Willis, op. cit., p. 67.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 69-70.

the scene, it did not detract from other important aspects. For Willis, there was no river "perhaps in all the scenery of the world, which, in the same space, presents so many of the various shapes and beauties of running and falling water." One particular aspect which Willis believed was inadequately captured by "artists in drawing the river" was the "impression of deep-down-itude which is produced by the close approach of the lofty walls of rock, capped by the overleaning woods, and with the sky apparently resting, like a ceiling, upon the leafy architraves. It conveys, somehow, the effect of a subter-natural river -- on a different level, altogether, from our common and above-ground water-courses."⁹⁰ Willis' enthusiasm for Trenton Falls extended beyond the merely descriptive. He noted that Trenton Falls in particular, and waterfalls in general, influenced American cultural life. Willis masks his own interests, but from his career, one may legitimately conclude that his primary concern was with the "stirring and sweet influences" of natural wonders on "oratory and poetry."

The best minds of the country have been subjected to these stirring and sweet influences, and delicious memories have been laid up, with brilliant fancies to keep them company, and we know not where to point to these unseen but most valuable treasures. Still, they are not lost. Bright visions of scenery, and the deep thoughts they awaken, are always well turned to account. Some are used in oratory and some in poetry, some in the pulpit and some in love, some in books

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 70-71.

and some to make homes happy -- and so, Trenton influences are distributed and do good, even though we cannot trace them from where they spring. 91

Fanny Kemble's muted enthusiasm for the carriage ride from Utica quickly evaporated on her arrival at the Falls. First, she settled into the "Rural Resort," which after Sherman's death in 1828, was sold to a "couple of nice young people, who live in this solitude all the year round, and maintain themselves and a beautiful big baby by the profits they derive from the pilgrims to Trenton."⁹² She prepared for a stay long enough to absorb fully the wonders of Trenton Falls. That many visitors spent only one night at the "Rural Resort" evoked a bitter reaction from a romantic such as Kemble, indicating the differing sensibilities of a romantic Englishwoman and some pragmatic, anonymous Americans. After reporting that visitors travelled to Trenton Falls and "without even going down to the river," returned to Utica satisfied with having been at Trenton, Kemble explodes.

The utter insensibility of the generality of Americans to the beauty and sublimity of Nature is nothing short of amazing. . . . They literally appear to me to want a sense. I have been filled with astonishment and perplexity at the total indifference with which they behold scenes of grandeur and loveliness that any creature with half a soul, would gaze at with feelings almost of adoration. But in these glorious tabernacles of nature, where God's majesty seems, as it were, visibly resting on his

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 89.

⁹² Kemble, op. cit., p. 249.

works, I have seen Americans come and stare, and stand for a moment, and depart again, apparently impressed with nothing but the singularity of the man or woman who could remain there longer than they did. What can be the cause of this? -- Is it possible that a perception of the beautiful in nature is a result of artificial cultivation? -- is it that the grovelling narrowness of the usual occupations to which the majority addict themselves has driven out of them the fine spirit, which is God's altar in man's souls? -- is it that they become incapable of⁹³ beauty? Wretched people!

At the river's edge, Kemble was initially overwhelmed by fear rather than awe. As a woman, she was no doubt expected to exhibit some anxiety and her description is markedly different in this respect from those of her male contemporaries. "We dared not turn our heads, for fear of tumbling into the black whirlpool below." Farther along, she and a companion "began to grow dizzy with the sound and motion of the churning darkness. . . . I was in agony lest we should slip from the narrow dripping ledges along which we crawled." But anxiety did not entirely prevent her from enjoying the scene. She had apparently not studied the guidebook descriptions of the Falls, for she knew neither

its height [nor] width; I only knew it was extremely beautiful, and came pouring down like a great rolling heap of amber. The rocks are high to the heavens, scooped, and singularly regular; and the sides of the torrent are now and then paved with large smooth layers of rock, as even and regular in their proportions as if the fairies had done the work.

All in all, Kemble thought the Falls "beautiful, most

⁹³Ibid., pp. 256-7.

beautiful; not a place to visit for a day, but to live the summer away in."⁹⁴

The wet, narrow and dangerous path beside the gorge contributed significantly to the fear and "reverential awe" tourists felt in visiting Trenton Falls. While such paths caused much consternation to those fearful for their balance and even their life, the element of danger served to heighten the desirability of the reward. Fear was an integral part of the wilderness experience and to the meaning of the image beyond the danger. The path at Trenton Falls was literally "a way in the wilderness" -- a physical and emotional trial for the traveller. It is not surprising that tourists emphasized the dangers and risks of their pilgrimage for they thereby emphasized the importance of their goal -- to see the magnificence of God's creation. Dangers were both attractive and feared; the promised glory at the end of the path usually outweighed the risks. James Macauley's experience is a good example. His important Natural, Statistical and Civil History of the State of New York is, as the title implies, a rather dry volume. Yet in the very midst of a somewhat technical description of Trenton Falls, Macauley bursts out with the joy of a romantic.

While you are passing along the narrow and sinuous path leading by the projections, and by the brinks of headlong precipices, you tremble with reverential awe, when you consider that one false step might precipitate you into the restless torrent below,

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 249-53.

and in an instant consign you to a watery grave. You see what a feeble creature man is, and are forcibly impressed with ideas of wisdom and power of that mighty Being who commanded the earth to emerge from the deep and the waters to Flow. 95

Other notices of fear are equally revealing of the tension tourists felt between the attraction of danger, and the promise of beauty and sublimity. Captain Frederick Marryat was relieved on emerging from the cliff-hanging experience untarnished.

There was one [rapids] down in a chasm between two river rocks which it was painful to look long upon, and watch with what a deep plunge -- what irresistable force -- the waters dashed down and then returned to their surface, as if struggling and out of breath. As I stood over them in their wild career, listening to the roaring as if in anger, and watching the madness of their spread, I felt a sensation of awe -- an inward acknowledgement of the tremendous power of Nature; and, after a time, I departed with feelings of gladness to escape from thoughts which became painful when so near danger. 96

Frances Trollope was similarly anxious, but noted that efforts were underway in 1832 to reduce the hazard to visitors.

By the aid of gunpowder, a sufficient quantity of rock has been removed to afford a fearful footing round a point. . . . I suffered considerably before I reached this point where the ground was visible. . . . here the chain failed, and my courage with it, though the rest of the party continued

⁹⁵ Macauley, op. cit., p. 201. Davison, op. cit. quotes this passage on page 201.

⁹⁶ Frederick Marryat, Diary in America (Philadelphia: 1839) in three volumes. Reprinted in 1962, edited with notes and introduction by Sydney Jackman (New York: Knopf Borzoi Books, 1962), p. 103.

for some way further, and reported largely of still increasing shadows cast over the abyss, the rival clamour of the torrent and the storm, and the delightful exaltation of the spirits which sets danger at defiance.⁹⁷

One might legitimately ask whether or not the increased ease of access to the gorge decreased the "reverential awe" of the scene.

Nine years later, Joseph Gurney viewed the Falls and passed off the danger as minimal for careful tourists. He noted only that "part of the walk is dangerous; and carelessness has here been sometimes followed with the loss of life."⁹⁸ By the time of Gurney's visit, the path had been significantly improved. Ten years later, when N. P. Willis published Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive, the dangers of walking the leafy path had disappeared. The "Rural Resort" had all the luxuries of a first-class hotel, and there was "neither danger nor over-fatigue present in seeing all that the place has to show of the grand and the beautiful."⁹⁹

Excepting Willis and Sherman, praises for Trenton Falls came from Europeans, not Americans, lending some authority to Kemble's astonishment at the "utter insensibility" of American tourists of American scenery.

Americans were more excited by the potentially tillable

⁹⁷ Trollope, op. cit., pp. 215-6.

⁹⁸ Joseph John Gurney, A Journey in North America Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie (Norwich: Printed for Private Circulation by Joseph Fletcher, 1841), pp. 299-300.

⁹⁹ Willis, op. cit., p. 12.

land, which did not, of course, satisfy the romantic demand of the Fanny Kembles. Yet, the "generality" of Americans did not include everybody. Mary Murray spent time at the Falls, though she hardly displays the romantic ecstasy of Kemble.

I think that I have never spent a day more delightfully. The Falls and the accompanying scenery far exceeded my expectations. The stupendous rocks, precipices and successive cataracts, form the most picturesque and romantic whole I have ever witnessed; nature seems to have been playing some of her most graceful gambols and you may stroll on for miles and still find a few new cataracts, and scenery more and more grotesque and beautiful. 100

A more notable exception to Kemble's generalization is Elizabeth F. L. Ellet.¹⁰¹ Ellet was well acquainted with the language of British aesthetics, and put her fashionable vocabulary to proper use at Trenton Falls. Due to the abundance of fossils, she introduced her experiences with an observation peculiar to Trenton.

If you are a naturalist, you will stop to collect some of the curious specimens; but, if inclined to prefer the living to the loveliness of Nature, you will cast a glance up the gorge, where you have a view of the first rapid, gushing from the arms of the woods. It is picturesque, beyond description.

Ellet gives us a clue as to what constituted the picturesque, although we must never take such clues too seriously. Meanings were highly flexible.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Murray, *op. cit.*, n.p.

¹⁰¹ For biographical information on Ellet, see chapter 4.

The rocky gorge, the tall frowning pines,
 the ragged trees on the verge and half-way
 down, the swiftly flowing creek, or river,
 as it should be called at your feet, the
 succession of falls a little way up,
 together with the varied assemblage of
 objects, which the pencil, not the pen,
 must portray, form, altogether, a picture
 whose wild loveliness surpasses the most
 gorgeous creation of fancy. 102

Ellet preferred the contained and controlled
 picturesque over the threatening and less controlled,
 though nonetheless attractive, sublime. Ellet felt com-
 fortable with well-defined scenery and uncomfortable with
 extravagant wildness. Distinguishing between the two
 principal Falls at Trenton, Ellet suggests that wildness
 may be just as characteristic of the picturesque as of the
 sublime, the distinction between the two being principally
 a matter of size. With respect to the larger Falls,
 "there is more force and grandeur. . . .and perhaps, less
 of the wildly picturesque." It is similar to the wildness
 of the fifth Fall, whose

stern bluffs tower over your head, . . .
 to the right, may be seen the lower part
 of the fifth, or Cascade Fall, dashing
 wildly over piled and broken rocks. Its
 tumultuous raving, amidst this scene of
 quiet beauty, might remind one of the
 frenzy of a tragic queen, when the silent
 spectators stand aghast at her disquieted
 demeanor. 103

102 Elizabeth F. L. Ellet, Rambles About the Country (Boston:
 Marsh, Capen, Lyon and Webb, 1840), pp. 161-3. This
 volume was published under the sanction of the Board of
 Education of the State of Massachusetts, Juvenile Series,
 Vol. 9.

103 Ibid., pp. 164-6.

As one should expect, a sampling of comments from European visitors indicates that they were much more familiar with and accustomed to romantic terminology than Americans. E. T. Coke believed that

scarcely anything can be conceived more grand or picturesque than the first view of the surrounding objects. . . .I have seen many falls, but none possessing such a variety of scenery or differing so much in the formation of the cataract as these; and of their sublimity, but a very faint idea can be conveyed from description. 104

Coke suggests sources for both sublimity and picturesqueness. The "impetuous rush of water" which formed the gorge and the ability of certain types of rock to "withstand the force of the torrent" created a series of ledges over which the water fell and islands around which the water was forced to flow. The greater the force of the cataract (depending on the amount of water and the height of the Falls), the greater the sublimity. The variety of courses over which the water flowed contributed to picturesqueness.

Abdy echoed Coke's reasons for calling Trenton Falls picturesque.

There are several [Falls] in succession, and at regular intervals; each characterized by some peculiar feature, with which the surrounding landscape has impressed it. You have here the constituents of picturesque beauty in great perfection: rock, wood and water in a pleasing variety of position and connection.

Yet for Abdy, the area was not as picturesque as it might

¹⁰⁴Coke, op. cit., p. 211.

have been, for the high sides of the river were "clothed with pines and other trees in such profusion as to cover the declivity, and conceal those projections and inequalities, which, if exposed here and there to the view, would add much to the effect of the whole." In spite of this seeming critique, Abdy concluded on a positive note. "This lovely spot fully realized my expectations; and I should have much regretted returning to New York without an acquaintance, except by description, with one of the most interesting scenes in the state."¹⁰⁵

While criticism of the Falls itself was rare, pilgrims expressed concern about the intrusion of human-kind. Improvement of the treacherous paths was universally recommended for reasons of safety, but establishment of a small refreshment stand was not welcomed. Robert Playfair considered the gorge, falls and surrounding scenery "a scene of the wildest grandeur," yet complained that "all that is wanted is a safe path to view it."¹⁰⁶ Apparently, the proprietors initially focussed their capital on a more lucrative improvement.

The Americans possess a most singular taste for marring the beauty of every place which can boast of anything like scenery, by introducing a barroom into the most romantic and conspicuous spot. Consequently, there is a little white, painted wooden shanty perched upon the very brow of the High Falls, from

¹⁰⁵ Abdy, op. cit., pp. 330-31.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Playfair, Recollections of a Visit to the United States and the British Provinces of North America (Edinburgh: Constable and Company 1856), p. 50.

which all kinds of liquors are distributed to the Yankee admirers of nature, after they have undergone the overpowering fatigue of walking 400 yards from the hotel.¹⁰⁷

Though favorably impressed with the scenery, the "one sad drawback" also drew the ire of Thomas Hamilton.

At precisely the most beautiful point of the scene there has been erected -- what, good reader? -- but you will never guess, -- a dram shop! How utterly so wild and beautiful a scene is degraded by the presence of a drinking shop may be readily conceived, and the outrage on taste; and even decency, is the more gratuitous, since the spot on which the building is erected is not but a mile from the hotel! ¹⁰⁸

The most intense reaction to human intrusion at Trenton Falls came, however, not from a European, but from Anthony Bleecker (1770-1827), an American author whose verse was well enough respected to warrant inclusion in the 1837 New York Book of Poetry. Founder and patron of the New-York Historical Society and today memorialized by a street in New York's Greenwich Village, Bleecker wrote "Trenton Falls, Near Utica" in the year of his death just four years after the "large addition" to the "Rural Resort" was opened to the public. The poem is remarkable for its sensitive balancing of the values of pure, untamed wilderness and the compromise of those values by human beings seeking sublimity with comfort.

A mood of reverence for the unmarred wilderness,

¹⁰⁷Coke, op. cit., p. 212.

¹⁰⁸Thomas Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (New York: A. M. Kelley Reprints of Economic Classics, 1968), Vol. II, p. 300. This volume was originally published in 1833.

cherished for its own sake, pervades this poem. Bleecker also recognizes the ability of nature to slowly reassert itself in the face of human intrusion and that the forces of nature transcend the penultimate desires and actions of humankind. Human beings, he implies, must learn to respect and abide by the natural order. The poem is important both for an unusual balance of the cultural values of nature and the conflicting desires of American growth and progress, as well as an implied judgment on the actions of human beings in the wilderness environment.

Ye hills, who have for ages stood
 Sublimely in your solitude,
 Listening the wild water's roar,
 As thundering down, from steep to steep,
 Along your wave-worn side they sweep,
 Dashing their foam from shore to shore.

Wild birds, that loved the deep recess,
 Fell beast that roved the wilderness,
 And savage men once hover'd round:
 But startled at your bellowing waves,
 Your frowning cliffs, and echoing caves,
 Affrighted fled the enchanted ground.

How changed the scene! -- your lofty trees,
 Which bent but to the mountain breeze,
 Have sunk beneath the woodman's blade;
 New sun-light through your forest pours,
 Paths wind along your sides and shores,
 And footsteps all your haunts invade.

Now boor, and beau, and lady fair,
 In gay costume each day repair,
 Where thy proud rocks exposed stand,
 While echoes, from her old retreats,
 With babbling tongue strange words repeats,
 From babblers on your stony stand.

And see -- the torrents rocky floor,
 With names and dates all scri-bled o'er,
 Vile blurs on nature's heraldry;
 O bid your river in its race,
 These mean memorials soon efface,
 And keep your own proud album free.

Languid thy tides, and quell'd thy powers,
 But soon Autumnus with his showers
 Shall all thy wasted strength restore;
 Then will these rambles down thy steep,
 With terror pale their distant keep
 Nor dare to touch thy trembling shore.¹⁰⁹

For all the excitement over Trenton Falls, the image of Niagara hung in the mist. Since many tourists who visited Trenton were on their way to the great cataract or were returning to the Hudson River, the expectations and memories of America's most famous natural wonder were bound to influence the images of Trenton Falls. Comparisons were inevitable, for Niagara was the standard against which all falling water was judged.

It is impossible to say that one Falls was preferred to the other; preferences depended upon what John Fowler called the "medium of attraction." On the one hand, a certain aesthetic category was generally associated with each Falls (the "medium of attraction"); on the other, not all visitors preferred the sublime to the beautiful or the picturesque. Fowler recognized that each Falls was different, but rejected pressures to compare, contrast or even imagine an image of Trenton based upon a verbal comparison with Niagara. "It is natural to wish to realize by comparison; to impress upon the mind by what we have seen, some magic or idea of what we have not; but every attempt

¹⁰⁹ Anthony Bleecker, "Trenton Falls, Near Utica," in the New York Book of Poetry, edited by Charles Fenno Hoffman (New York: G. Dearborn, 1837), pp. 110-111. This poem was composed in 1827.

of this kind must be abandoned here." Fowler had been prepared for his visit to Trenton Falls. "Being setting out for these interesting Falls, I was cautioned not to raise my expectations too high -- told that I should think nothing of them after Niagara." Yet that observation was

of no weight whatsoever. I contemplated the scene with exquisite delight, as who would not? . . . Niagara must thunder as in peerless majesty and Trenton bound along through its enchanting ravine, but they remain Niagara and Trenton still. . . .to suppose a parallel is to do an injustice to both. Let each be viewed through its own medium of attraction, and each will be found deserving of all the admiration that can be lavished upon it -- and much more. 110

Fowler's attempt to separate the experience of Trenton Falls and Niagara was unusual. For Jane and Marion Turnbull, a comparison was fruitful in clarifying certain aspects of romanticism. Trenton Falls was

indeed a most beautiful and romantic spot and in comparing it afterwards with Niagara, we thought that what Trenton wanted in size and grandeur was almost made up by the exquisite variety of view, and picturesque beauty, which appeared to change at every point of the landscape. 111

John Sherman believed no economic harm would result from comparison. He granted the importance of the competition and rather than claiming a uniqueness for Trenton, chose

¹¹⁰ John Fowler, Journal of a Tour in the State of New York in the Year 1830; with Remarks on Agriculture in those Parts Most Eligible for Settlers (London: Whittaker, Treacher and Arnot, 1831), p. 166. It is interesting to note that Fowler quotes extensively from James Macauley's Natural, Statistical and Civil History of New York State, op. cit., in his description of Trenton Falls.

¹¹¹ Jane M. and Marion T. Turnbull, American Photographs in two volumes (London: T. C. Newby, 1859), Vol. I, p. 93.

to consider them as complementary natural wonders.

We have in effect a peerless majesty, the awful power, and the deep volleying thunder of the grand cataract of Niagara, which causes the heavens to shake and the earth to tremble; which forces the son of pride to feel himself mere insignificance on the verge of annihilation; and proclaims, in his astounded ears, what is meant by the existence, and what it is to stand before the throne of that infinite Supreme, who can make such an appalling display upon a comparatively single atom of the universe.¹¹²

Fanny Kemble used her experience of Niagara to emphasize the dangers of Trenton's paths. Given the expressions of awe at the power of Niagara (see chapter 8), one might expect that the size of Trenton Falls as compared to Niagara might lessen the fear felt by tourists. For Kemble, just the opposite was the case.

I do not know that the sense of danger has ever been so vivid in my mind as while walking along this narrow edge of eternity. Nothing around Niagara appeared to me half so full of peril as the path along the Trenton Falls, although I have hung over the brink of the last rock that vibrates on the very verge of that great abyss, and explored, entirely alone, the path under the huge watery curtain that falls from Table Rock. I do not know whether the mention of the late accidents at Trenton affected my imagination, and caused me to exaggerate the danger; but it appeared to me almost miraculous that every body passing along those narrow dripping, uneven ledges did not share the fate of the two unfortunate persons I have mentioned.¹¹³

Minor controversy also erupted over whether Trenton

¹¹² Sherman, op. cit., p. 22. (1847 edition)

¹¹³ Kemble, op. cit., p. 254. Table Rock was a major viewpoint at Niagara Falls. See chapter 8.

and Niagara should be seen in any particular order. Those who felt that Niagara was superior to Trenton usually suggested that tourists visit Trenton Falls first to prepare for the larger cataract. Embedded in this attitude was a belief that among the "mediums of attraction," the picturesque was inferior to the sublime. Cobden stated that "Trenton Falls should be seen before Niagara -- pretty and picturesque, not sublime."¹¹⁴ Curiously, those who preferred Trenton usually preferred the picturesque "medium of attraction" but seemed unconcerned as to which Falls was visited first. But John Fowler also rejected the usual preference for seeing Trenton before Niagara.

It is perfectly immaterial which you see first or last -- they are totally distinct and different scenes, and the interest and emotions which they excite are wildly separate and dissimilar. One would charm and engage, whilst the other fixed you in rapturous and awful engagement; the one in grandeur and sublimity, the other in the highest degree romantic and beautiful. ¹¹⁵

Europeans familiar with European cataracts were also given to comparison, reflecting their own hierarchy of water wonders, revealing which "medium of attraction" they preferred, and equally important, recognizing the cataracts of their Old World. Beaufoy found Trenton Falls "infinitely more picturesque than Cohoes," but lacking in the "vast masses of misshapen rocks, and aged oak stretching their mouldering trunks or bough across the chasm,

¹¹⁴Cobden, op. cit., p. 110.

¹¹⁵Fowler, op. cit., p. 166.

which so commonly gratify the eye among the rivulets in the west of England."¹¹⁶ Charles Murray was "disappointed."

The scenery of this country is upon so magnificent a scale, and its rivers so vast and deep, that I expected to see torrents and waterfalls such as I had never beheld before. The scenery is certainly very pretty. . . .but unless my memory very much deceives me, these Falls would gain nothing by comparison with the Falls of Bruar, Fyers,¹¹⁷ and others I have seen in Scotland.

Joshua T. Smith identified one specific reason for his disappointment -- the barrage of American propaganda which made Trenton Falls out to be more than it actually was. Although in seeming conflict with Fanny Kemble's complaint that Americans were utterly without appreciation for their natural wonders, the travel literature to which Smith refers reflected a national mood of wonder and awe for things American or made in America. A Briton might be disappointed when expectations, established by examining the numerous tourist guidebooks, were jolted by the reality. Smith struggled to see the value of Trenton.

Yesterday we visited the much boasted Trenton and of course were disappointed -- this failure in our pleasure might have been partially our own faults -- for certainly before this we ought to have learnt how to appreciate American admiration of their own scenery had we not heard so very much -- we must have been pleased -- are gratified for there really is great peculiarity in the scene 'tho' to my feelings the magic of the place would be caused by the lights

¹¹⁶Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 55.

¹¹⁷Charles A. Murray, op. cit., pp. 62-3.

and shadows of moonlight and a more copious
supply of water. 118

Throughout this chapter, the "subdued spirituality" which for the most part remained submerged across New York State has been at the periphery of our discussion. I have noted that only major natural wonders such as the view from Pine Orchard elicited enough enthusiasm such that a religious language was resorted to for its expression. But Trenton Falls, although not as important as Pine Orchard or Niagara Falls, was sufficiently wonderful to gain a reputation as a retreat for pilgrims, not just as a resort for tourists. In concluding this chapter, let us consider this aspect of Trenton Falls more directly.

Francis Lieber's complaint about American descriptions of their natural environment is appealing but deceptive.

You must endeavor to pick out for yourself the interesting facts from the chaff of poetico-religious prating, to which, as yet, the Americans are certainly more given than any other civilized nation. Many books. . . . descend into this verbose and therefore unfelt 'enthusemussy'. . . . which the Germans would call a 'screwed' admiration of nature. True, deep-felt delight at the beauties of nature, is silent, or it speaks a language very easily to be distinguished from that of cant, which carries with it the proof that he who utters it thinks of himself and his words far more than of the subject which, as he pretends, causes his transport. A rude or blunt man, who feels nothing at

118 Joshua T. Smith, Journal in America 1837-1838, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Floyd B. Streeter, Archivist of the Michigan Historical Commission (Metuchan, New Jersey: Printed for Charles F. Heartman, 1925), p. 51.

beholding nature's magnificence, or charms,
 is no agreeable companion; but, if I must
 choose, I would a thousand times prefer 119
 him to a sentimental prattler.

Lieber appeals because there was so much "cant" under the banner of romantic enthusiasm. Yet simply to reject "poetico-religious prating" does not recognize the occasional emergence of a subdued spirituality in response to natural wonders. If the enthusiasm for Trenton Falls betrays no profound religious sentiment, the feelings of "awe" and "reverence" were not insignificant to either the individual tourists or the culture as a whole. Pilgrims expressed a popular religiosity at "Nature's temples" -- places where spiritual yearnings emerged and common religious assumptions were affirmed no matter how tentative and awkward they might be. Even such an elegant cultural hack as Nathaniel Parker Willis, whose language betrays the easiness he felt with his self-advertised feelings of feebleness, did suggest that the waters were "tremendous indeed; and overpower man's feeble frame with the paralyzing impression of Omnipotence."¹²⁰ However, far from being paralyzed, Willis remained very much on top of the situation. On another occasion, Willis reviewed

¹¹⁹ Francis Lieber, Letters to a Gentleman in Germany, Written After A Trip from Philadelphia to Niagara (New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1971), p. 262. This volume was originally published in Philadelphia by the Carey, Lea and Blanchard Company in 1834. It is one of the most interesting, detailed and passionate visions of America published during this period. Lieber lived from 1800 to 1872.

¹²⁰ Willis, op. cit., p. 22.

his contemplative activities with an ennui which leaves the reader suspicious of his sincerity. Furthermore, the brief comment is immediately followed by an extended discussion of Trenton Falls' geology. Referring to the gorge, he claims that he had

retired at midnight for contemplation,
to familiarize himself with mortality: and
here his children have left behind the
bustle and cares of day, to pay their more
solemn adorations to Nature's almighty and
all-glorious God. 121

But take Lieber on his own terms. In spite of his blanket dismissal of all "poetico-religious prating," one point deserves further comment. Silence was a familiar alternative to an "enthusemusy!" Fanny Kemble, for example, valued silence as a complement to verbal enthusiasm, but it did not prevent her from engaging in verbal description.

Oh, fair world! -- Oh, strange, and beautiful,
and holy places -- where one's soul
meets one in silence -- and where one's
thoughts arise, with the everlasting incense
of the waters, from the earth, which is His
footstool, to the heavens, which are His 122
throne.

Kemble suggests that the experience of oneself is uniquely available in a wilderness environment of solitude and stillness.

Expressions of "enthusemusy" continued to drown out the few who desired stillness. Some of these were

¹²¹Ibid., p. 38.

¹²²Kemble, op. cit., p. 257.

closely connected with feelings of danger.¹²³ But some were not. Caroline Gilman's "poetico-religious prating" is typical of the latter. In introducing Trenton Falls, she sets the stage for a poem about Trenton Falls. Excusing the introduction of mermaids, the setting demands quotation in full.

I had seen pictures of Trenton Falls.
 Pictures? Mockeries! The very best of
 them no more tell their character than a
 drop of water describes an ocean. Here is
 not one fall alone, but a procession, that
 takes the eye with delicious surprise.
 Just as the heart has ceased to beat with
 the grandeur of one view a few steps show
 another, almost more beautiful. It seemed
 to me that nature had prepared a great dio-
 ramic display for man. I fancied that
 unseen spirits occupied those cliffs, towering
 above, as spectators of the gorgeous scene;
 and there is one spot where the prince of
 the falls must revel. Those who have visited
 the place, will remember how they looked up
 with awe to that rocky, overhanging throne.
 And do they remember a seat jutting out
 between two cascades, and will they not
 believe with me, that there some beautiful
 form sits, invisible, twining her hair,
 which falls in the surf, with her own arbor
 vitae leaves, and gracing her fair cold
 brow with crystals from her own rocks, while
 she glances upward to the monarch on the
 cliff, who now hurls down the severed mass,
 or bathes in the misty shadows that rise 124
 from this palace of water?

The "procession" of Falls heightened the element of contrast and encouraged the romantic "prating" of tourists.

Two different reactions to two scenes within yards of each other provided the theme of Caroline Gilman's poem

¹²³See pages 293-296.

¹²⁴Gilman, op. cit., pp. 94-5.

about Trenton. Gilman first praises the loveliness and the beauty of a peaceful, pastoral waterfall scene, leading her to thoughts of joy and love. Her images are soft, tranquil, and tender.

I thank thee for this wondrous birth of joy,
Unfelt and unimagined till this hour!

Was't not enough that thou didst tinge the rose
With delicate glow, -- throw silvery whiteness o'er
The lily's cup, -- touch the bright sea-shell, like
A spirit's blush, and weave a whisper through
Its spiral folds, like murmuring love-notes, soft --
Arch the rainbow into mingled hues,
More beautiful by contrast with heaven's blue,
O'er western skies throw tents of gracious light,
Smooth down the river with a mirror's truth,
And wrap around the fresh and teeming earth
Its lovely drapery of chastened green?
Was't not enough for me, that from my youth
Mine eyes have bathed in beauty, banquetted
On lovely sights, and listened to sweet sounds?¹²⁵

In contrast with this mood of peacefulness, Gilman strikes a more discordant note in the second part. Here she reflects on that section of the gorge where the water rushes wildly, where the highest Falls are located, and where the river, instead of meandering peacefully, churns with energy and force. The awful sublimity of this section is not relaxing. Gilman does not sit back in empty tranquility to absorb the peace of nature. Rather, the rushing of the gorge required her activity. No longer is she called to "acts of grateful love," but to acts of "conquest o'er the world."

Grateful was I for this; but now I feel
The beauty of the awful and the sublime.
My soul leaps upward to these towering cliffs,
And onward with the stream!

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 95-6.

Father! and God!

Enlarge my spirit for this mighty gift!
 When I consorted with the buds and the flowers,
 Heard the full choir of woodland melody,
 Gazed up in reverie on placid skies,
 Or wandered by the pure, meandering stream,
 Or prayed beneath the bright-eyed lights of heaven,
 Looking serene out from their azure home,
 Or blest the moonlight, as it burst in joy,
 Like youthful thoughts, enkindling hill and dale;
 I felt as if a mother's gentle voice,
 Called on her child to acts of grateful love.
 But now that I have communed with the vast --
 Seen the veil rent from Nature's stormy shrine,
 Heard her wild lessons of magnificence
 In cataract voices, 'mid the echoing rocks,
 I feel a louder call upon my soul --
 A trumpet sound; and as a soldier girds
 Himself for war, so will I gird my thoughts 126
 For conquest o'er the world!

Gilman expresses no preference for "acts of grateful love" over acts of "conquest o'er the world," indicating only that the trumpet call of the latter is louder. At Trenton Falls, tourists were reluctant to set either one in priority over the other. Like Frederick Marryat, they cherished the contrast, "wandering from one point of view to another, never tiring of its beauty, wildness and vastness; and if you do not exclaim with the Mussulman, God is great! you feel it through every sense and at every pulsation of the heart."¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the general preference for Niagara Falls over Trenton Falls would seem to indicate that the awful sublimity of Niagara Falls and parts of Trenton Falls was preferred, at least for short periods of time, to the peaceful beauty

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Marryat, op. cit., p. 104.

of other parts of Trenton Falls.

With Trenton Falls, the first part of the trans-State trip was over. Appetites were whetted for those continuing on to the great cataract further west; the long, tiresome eastward journey was happily interrupted for those returning to New York City from Niagara Falls. Certainly Trenton Falls could not compare to Niagara. In fact, Kemble noted that some tourists ignored it. T. L. McKenney was one. He did not visit the Falls, yet wrote a typical analysis of it. With a little imagination, a hand-me-down understanding of romanticism and aesthetic language, and a physical description, a person might fairly well be expected to construct the culturally determined feelings associated with a natural wonder.

But for the heat of the day and my fears
of exercise and exposure to the
 sun's rays. . . .I might have. . . .over-
 come the inducements. . . .the inclination
 I felt to join the company and see, what is
 on all hands admitted to be one of the best
 exhibitions in, perhaps, the world. The
 Falls of Niagara are admitted to be more
 grand and overpowering: the quantity of
 water discharged at them is greater beyond
 comparison with what is discharged at
 Trenton Falls; but the loveliness and
 enchantment with the latter consist, it is
 said, in the combination of the cascades
 and the adjacent scenery -- both seeming
 to have agreed, beforehand, harmoniously
 to assist in presenting whatever could
 fascinate the eye and charm the fancy of
 the beholder, and induce man to seek their
 retirement for the gratification of both.
 I am the more satisfied of the loveliness
 of these falls, from the description of them
 the party have given me since their return;
 for there can be no mistaking the taste of

such people.¹²⁸

But issue of taste was the crux. Where one travelled and what one saw or experienced was a matter of status. Therefore, the struggle of those who would benefit by increased tourist traffic to Trenton was to minimize the negative comparison to Niagara. Tourists, on the other hand, were under the subtle pressure to adjust their aesthetic values and enthusiasm to a variety of natural wonders. Natural wonders were being rated just as television programs are now rated. But the contrast was much more complicated then than now, for not only was the number of tourists at issue, but also the quality of the experience. Natural wonders were being rated as wonders -- for their ability to catalyze into consciousness a subdued and undifferentiated spirituality normally dormant in the eyes and hearts of viewers. Natural wonders were being rated for the degree of "reverential awe" they extracted from tourists. Furthermore, the language of rating was not as precise as it is today; aesthetic categories or "mediums of attraction," without fixed meanings, were employed to indicate a wonder's rating.

In the contest with Niagara, Trenton Falls could never compete in sublimity, but it could compete in beauty. Mary Murray concluded her description of Trenton Falls with a statement which is probably accurate. She said

¹²⁸McKenney, op. cit., p. 66.

that Trenton Falls "are well worthy of the attention of visitors, Foreigners, and people who have any pretention to taste, or pretend to have any love for the Sublime and the Beautiful in Nature; as even Niagara itself."¹²⁹ In the hierarchy of natural wonders, Trenton Falls played a crucial role both as a contrast to Niagara Falls and a refreshing interlude in the long, tiring journey across New York State.

¹²⁹

Mary Murray, op. cit., n.p.

Chapter 7:

An Untamed Wilderness

The tiring trip from Utica to Niagara Falls boasted few wonders to compare with the cataracts spaced at convenient intervals between Albany and Utica. There were waterfalls, particularly in the Finger Lakes Region, but none was sufficiently renowned to distract many travellers from the beckoning wonder further west. It took a significant reputation to justify delaying side-trips and to encourage a stay long enough to absorb any given natural wonder. Because of the limitations of time, tourists were reluctant to spread themselves too thinly, though this did not prevent them from projecting a variety of images. As we have already noted, for most travellers, minor natural wonders were not able to stir the subdued spirituality which tourists expected to flow freely at Niagara Falls. As we complete the journey across New York State, we shall note how little attention was paid to the scenery, except as the location of settlement and development. To view the two largest Finger Lakes for example, required only that tourists cast a glance south from their conveyance as they passed on to the west. That was sufficient exposure for most of them.

The distance from Utica to Niagara Falls was more than twice that from Albany to Utica. This, coupled with the less "improved" landscape, did not encourage the detailed descriptions typical of the landscapes east of Utica. Travellers grew bored. The raw, untamed wilderness was everywhere in evidence and tourists longed for the

contrasts and grandeur which they associated with worthwhile scenery. In a sense, their aesthetic sensibilities were stifled by the brooding presence of the forests. This in part explains the enthusiasm with which they greeted signs of civilization, whether a lonely log cabin or a "bustling" town.

In addition to the increasingly monotonous landscape, the trip became more difficult. The Mohawk River narrowed and turned north as one travelled upstream, thereby becoming unsatisfactory as a path for transportation. Furthermore, the usefulness of the old Iroquois Trail and the Genesee Road, built westward from Utica in 1794 and completed to Buffalo in 1798, was largely determined by the weather.¹ In 1825, the Erie Canal rescued travellers from their plight.

The trip from Utica to Niagara Falls divides conveniently into five sections. (1) From Utica to Syracuse, there was little romantic enthusiasm and no natural wonders. (2) In contrast, west of Syracuse and through the Finger Lake towns of Skaneateles, Auburn, Waterloo and Geneva, the lake scenery was well-received, partly because it relieved images of the trip between Utica and Syracuse. Occasionally, tourists would take a boat down either Cayuga or Seneca Lake to visit Goodwin's Falls (sometimes called Taghanic and known today as

¹This road lives on in name only as the familiar Genesee Street in towns along the midriff of the state.

Taughannock), Ithaca, and numerous gorges and glens. (3) The largely unbroken wilderness journey from Geneva to Rochester was greeted with sullen and begrudged tolerance. (4) Rochester was acclaimed as an oasis of civilization in the midst of a howling wilderness, for it provided relative comfort after the difficult trip from Geneva. However, the response to Rochester's leading natural wonder, Genesee Falls, was more subdued because industry had compromised its natural beauty. (5) From Rochester, two overland routes complemented the canal -- a southern route through Batavia and a northern "Ridgeroad" (also known as the Ridgeway or the Alluvial Way) along the edge of Lake Ontario. And then the Falls!

Similar to those of other parts of the state, general descriptions of western New York reveal a great variety of images. A sample of three -- one American and two European -- indicates the wide divergence. American J. A. Clark, who suggested that the lower Mohawk River Valley was the "Garden of America,"² both compromises the particularity of his metaphor and extends its symbolic value by applying it to the whole state. Furthermore, he defines two components of the "garden" -- natural and man-made.

I am sure the traveller who passes along
the old post road from Utica to Buffalo,
and sees the hundred beautiful villages,
the noble forests, the majestic trees, the
rich foliage, the luxuriant orchards, the

²See chapter 6.

luscious corn, the vast enclosures of dark, fertile soil, the peaceful lakes and silvery streams that everywhere meet the eye, will exclaim, THE GARDEN OF AMERICA! And then when he sees all this beautiful region intersected by canals and bound together by turnpikes, and lake and stream navigation, he will feel that western New York possesses advantages of a most singular and superior quality. 3

Two Europeans were somewhat less impressed although that may be partly explained by the fact that they visited the area before Clark did. Frances Wright straddled an aesthetic fence. Through the "boundless" monotony of the thick forest, she identified some positive elements in the landscape and had both the imagination and the grace to turn a picture of death into a symbol of hope. One can not expect such a balanced image from most travellers.

The road, though rough, was not wholly without its interest; at first, opening prospects of hills and valleys, where sometimes the white walls of a young settlement glanced in the sun, relieving the boundless 'continuity of shade' and then bordered occasionally with cornfields and young orchards of peaches and apples, groaning beneath their weight of riches. The withered trees of the forest stood indeed among them; but though these should mar beauty, they give a character to the scene that speaks to the heart, if not 4 to the eye.

Secondly, John Fowler who most severely berates western

³John A. Clark, Gleanings by the Way (Philadelphia: W. J. and J. K. Simon, 1842), pp. 179-80. Mr. Clark was the Rector of St. Andrews Church, Philadelphia.

⁴Frances Wright, Views of Society and Manners in America: A Series of Letters from that Country to a Friend in England and During the years 1818, 1819, and 1820 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821), p. 183.

New York also most strongly identifies it as a wilderness. The elements of silence and solitude do not appear to capture his imagination.

In ranging the woods, I was particularly struck with their desolate and trackless appearance as well as the death-like silence which reigned around: there is nothing of the delightful harmony so often heard in ours, but you might fancy yourself the only object that had life within them, except that you are now and then aroused by the hoarse barking of a crow, just resembling that of a dog; the screaming of the buzzard hawk, or the tapping of the woodpecker. 5

An even worse picture was presented of a specific landscape scene between Utica and Syracuse. If undifferentiated silence is a greater injury than a focussed verbal critique, certainly one can legitimately conclude that this part of the trip was the least interesting to travellers. The vocal minority added insult to injury by combining cynicism with negativity.

The country through which we passed consisted chiefly of a marshy forest. . . . Here and there a town had sprung up in the wilderness, but nothing to interest the Spectator, who sees everywhere but one process and but one result. He looks for the picturesque, and finds the profitable, and wishes from the bottom of his heart that they had been compatible. 6

5 John Fowler, Journal of a Tour in the State of New York in the Year 1830; with Remarks on Agriculture in Those Parts Most Eligible for Settlers (London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Arnot, 1831), p. 112.

6 Thomas Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (New York: A. M. Kelley Reprints of Economic Classics in 2 volumes), Vol. II, pp. 301-2. These volumes were originally published in 1833.

Marryat noticed the same phenomenon, although his interpretation was slightly more positive. He recognized that

wild and dreary as the country is, the mass of forest is gradually receding, and occasionally some solitary tree is left standing throwing out its wide arms, and appearing as if in lamentation at its separation from its companions, with whom for centuries it had been in close friendship. Extremes meet. . . .Here Nature was deposed and about to resign her throne to the usurper Art. 7

Clark's celebration of western New York as the "Garden of America" functioned as a design, not a description. Americans continued to face the reality of a still untamed wilderness pierced only occasionally and unexpectedly by the hand of "Art." The response of most Americans had become an exercise in bland reportage, for they were understandably reluctant to criticize the landscape of their infant nation severely, regardless of how distant it remained from their pastoral ideal. William Darby stated simply and without emotion that it was an area "where the hand of man had made so little change in the primitive rudeness of nature."⁸ Prall confirms the image with unusual specificity.

22 miles distant from Utica a forest $\frac{1}{4}$ mile only is cleared. 31 Miles from

⁷ Frederick Marryat, Diary in America (Philadelphia, 1839), p. 107. The edition I have quoted was edited with notes and introduction by Sydney Jackman (New York: Knopf first Borzoi Edition, 1962).

⁸ William Darby, A Tour from the City of New York to Detroit (Chicago: Quadrangle Books American Classics Series, 1962), p. 221. This volume was originally published in 1819. Darby's tour extended from May 2, 1818 to September 22, 1818.

Utica is Oneida Creek about 200 acres only cleared two or three log huts. . . .All around the soil was sandy. . . .otherwise a complete forest. . . .in fact, the Canal runs through woods and swamps except each of the last mentioned places which had only about 200 acres of clean ground. 9

The fervent desire of Americans for a "clean" agriculturally productive ground virtually blocked the possibility that small patches of bright color, a lonely tree or other contrasts could relieve the overwhelmingly somber cast of the wilderness. Redemption could come only with the massive clear-cutting associated with permanent settlement. Wright and Marryat, on the other hand, were more sensitive to the possibility of relief from the monotony of the wilderness. Wright suggested that the road "was not wholly without its interest." And in spite of his strong general critique of the wilderness, Fowler was also open to the possibility of glory in the midst of gloom. He found a bright spot not far from Syracuse.

Before reaching Chitteningo [sic] there is one of the finest specimens of native forest I have seen in the country -- I ever saw -- tree interwoven with tree -- a dense mass of forest -- seeming to bid defiance to the footsteps, ay, even the hands of man; and yet but a few years may elapse ere this wilderness becomes a fertile plain, ere the share of the husbandman passes over its surface, and the abodes of happy industry are raised upon it! So rapid are the strides of improvement and cultivation in this enterprising country. 10

⁹David M. Prall, Journal of Jaunt from New York to Niagara, July 1821, kept by David Prall of New York City, son of Abraham and Marion Prall (Unpublished manuscript in the New-York Historical Society), n.p.

¹⁰Fowler, op. cit., p. 85.

Generally speaking, neither Americans nor Europeans valued the forest for what it was, although there were significant differences between their images. Both celebrated what it could be. Fowler states what would seem on the surface to be an impossibility. "Woodland is fully as valuable as cleared."¹¹ Today we might infer this to mean that the value of rapidly decreasing woodlands was at least equal to farmland. Not so one hundred and fifty years ago. Forestland was evaluated for its potential, not for its current value. Wilderness locations for retreat and renewal were hardly in scarce supply; sites for industry and development were top priority. For some, the result was not wholly satisfactory. West of Vernon, which Beaufoy claims to be "the most eligible site in all that neighborhood [for industry], . . . cultivation is scanty and badly conducted, and the aspect of everything is changed for the worse."¹²

In chapter five, I suggested that the encounter of tourists with native Americans along the midriff of the state served to differentiate the trip west from the trip north.¹³ The "captivity narratives" and similar types of popular literature are the most important sources for analyzing white images of the native Americans. Nevertheless, several tourists made informative references to

¹¹Ibid., p. 76.

¹²Beaufoy, Tour Through Parts of the United States and Canada by a British Subject (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1828), p. 58.

¹³See chapter 5.

native Americans.

Native American communities were convenient to the route between Utica and Syracuse, although the natives did not display their condition to passing tourists and tourists, with few exceptions, did not seek them out. The condition of these human symbols of the wilderness is exhibited in their having been forced to lead a "civilized" domestic life.

They cut a most miserable condition indeed:
They are naturally idle and lazy, hating
agriculture, as is clearly evinced by the
state of their fences and farms, and pick
up a scanty subsistence by making mats,
baskets, moccasons [sic], or other trifles.¹⁴

Benjamin Dorr, a professional Christian, goes further. While celebrating the conquest of the wilderness by the forces of a Christian civilization, he regrets that the pre-Christian children of the wilderness were not yet within the fold. Dorr praised one pastor who attempted

under Providence, to correct their morals,
and give them habits of industry and a
taste for the acts of Civilization. . . .
Saw their neat little Church with its
spire pointing to that Heaven where HE
resides. . . .Here the Anthems of
praise and thanksgiving now ascend to
the throne of the Most High God, in a
spot which once echoed only to the Wild
War-Whoop of the Savage! May the happy
time come soon, Oh Lord! when all the
heathen shall be given thee for an
inheritance. 15

¹⁴Beaufoy, op. cit.

¹⁵Benjamin Dorr, A Journal of Tours (1819-1864) (Unpublished manuscript #23 in the Cornell University Department of Archives and Manuscripts), p. 6.

Only Frances Wright could grant to the native Americans something of their past glory. Complaining that there was no geological equivalent of "Ben-Venue and Ben-Ann" to protect a pass in the Mohawk River Valley near Utica, she imagined a substitute which, though inadequate to the task of protection, served her fancy. One may, if "sportively inclined, picture out the wild Indian paddling his canoe, or springing from rock to rock, swift as the deer he pursues."¹⁶ Native Americans entered the viewfinders of fashionable tourists relatively infrequently. White images of the red Americans were influenced much more by the feelings and biases of settlers and captives who had direct contact with the red peoples than by the fashionable tourists.

Such was the trip between Utica and Syracuse -- unexciting and uneventful. At Syracuse, there was a noticeable change of mood. Most important, Syracuse was a major town compared with those immediately to the east. Furthermore, to the west was a smooth, easy drive along the top of the Finger Lakes and through the bustling towns of Auburn, Waterloo and Geneva, themselves rich in scenic views, but also the points of embarkation for side trips to the Finger Lakes. Benjamin Dorr, whose opinions of the natives were hardly calculated to recommend his favor in their society, reflected on the freshness of the scene as he emerged from the unredeemed landscape east of

¹⁶Wright, op. cit., p. 177.

Syracuse. From "Onondaga Hill,"

there is a beautiful view of the surrounding countryside for many miles distant. . . .A ride of 18 miles from Onondaga brought us to Skaneateles Lake, a most beautiful sheet of water. 17

An anonymous traveller reported that the prospects in the area were at once "beautiful, extensive and grand." In accordance with the pragmatic ideal of constructed scenery, the foreground of "flourishing commercial activity" was set off by

distinct and beautiful objects. The contours and inequalities of outline of the distant hills are still perceivable; but extending the view to the east and north, at one glance, the eye grasps millions and millions of acres. The background of this vast painting, is by distance, melted down into the appearance of an immense plain. The different streaks of light and shade, however, discover the deception. 18

Disturnell analyzes the same scene. But instead of isolating a foreground of "Commercial activity" from the "distinct and beautiful objects" in the distance, he seems to wash the scene with a smoothness and continuity, giving the reader a significantly different image. Yet the dichotomy remains.

This is a beautiful and romantic sheet of water; on the north it is surrounded by highly cultivated farms and country residences, while on the south the banks are more rugged and the scenery very

¹⁷Dorr, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁸_____, Extracts from an Eight-Week Trip from Albany to the Westward (Unpublished manuscript #1629, Cornell University Manuscripts and Archives), n.p.

picturesque and romantic.¹⁹

As early as 1822, the gardens and towns along the northern edge of the Finger Lakes were considered "beautiful" and even "truly delightful." Dorr hints at one source of renewed interest in the landscape -- a balanced combination of "fields of grain, forests of lofty timber, and flourishing villages and hamlets scattered along the roads which bespeak the industry and comfort of the inhabitants."²⁰ In 1818, four years earlier, John Duncan thought the "flourishing settlement of Waterloo. . . .most romantic," but leaves the reader to guess the particulars of his sentiment, recording only that his "astonishment [was] chiefly excited by the rapidity with which this and many other settlements on this road have started into maturity."²¹ Richard Beste appears more tantalized by the "amusing absurdity" of geographic nomenclature than by the wonders of the natural world. "Why will not Americans have a country of their own instead of trying to pass it

¹⁹ John Disturnell, The Traveller's Guide to the Hudson River, Saratoga Springs, Lake George, Falls of Niagara, and Thousand Islands; Montreal, Quebec, and the Saguenay River; also, to the Green Mountains and White Mountains and other parts of New England; Forming the Fashionable Northern Tour through the United States and Canada. With Maps and Embellishments (New York: The American News Company, 1864), p. 92.

²⁰ Dorr, op. cit.

²¹ John M. Duncan, Travels Through Part of the United States and Canada in 1818 and 1819 (Glasgow: Printed at the University Press for Hurst, Robinson, and Company, London, 1823), Vol. II, pp. 15-6.

off as a bastard Europe?" he asked.²² Clearly, although this region was more highly valued than that immediately east of Syracuse, most pilgrims streamed west with only a cursory impression of its aesthetic value.

Geneva, situated at the northern end of Seneca Lake the major town between Syracuse and Rochester, was one of the few, according to William Darby, where "common sense and analogy were consulted in the borrowed nomenclature."²³ On arriving in Geneva, DeWitt Clinton faced the same housing shortage as two travellers are reported to have discovered ten years earlier.

the house was full. . . .The inns at such a place as this will always be crowded at this season. A tour to Niagara. . . .is now common, and considered as a mere pleasurable excursion. 24

Even if Clinton exaggerated the ease of journeying to Niagara, it was increasingly true that the inns and other tourist facilities were overcrowded, for the whole area was growing and changing. Naturally, the image of the wilderness also changed. Although we may wonder why she exhibited surprise at such a situation, in 1808 Mary Murray complained that the area around Geneva was "more like wilderness than any we have yet seen," broken only by "log

²²J. Richard Beste, The Wabash: or, Adventures of an English Gentleman's Family in the Interior of America (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1855), Vol. I, p. 117.

²³Darby, op. cit., p. 130.

²⁴William Campbell, The Life and Writings of DeWitt Clinton (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849), p. 151.

huts, and very little cultivation."²⁵ She longed to "behold the face of Nature smile again" with the reappearance of civilization. Twenty years later, Tyrone Power suggested the extent of the change with a feeling not often encountered in the days before the area became "civilized."

The environs appear to possess an unusual number of tasteful villas; on all sides these might be distinguished, giving and receiving adornment from the situation. The lake itself looked like a huge mirror; and from its polished surface clearly reflected every turn of its shores, and each cloud that floated over it. Its characteristics are softness and repose; of a certainty it must have been a feminine spirit that presided at the creation of this spot, for its features are all of gentleness and beauty. 26

The same general impression was received some years earlier by William Darby, who had also emphasized the "soft" qualities of an arcadian landscape removed from the harder, rougher wilderness.

I have never visited a place which seems to combine in so small a compass so much to please in the softer features of rural landscape. . . . here, with health and competence, could I spend the remaining years of my life, without a sigh to return to in the bustling commercial capitals, where for so many years I had scarce enjoyed a quiet day. 27

²⁵ Mary Murray, Journal of a Tour from New York to Niagara 1805 (Unpublished manuscript, New-York Historical Society,), n.p. Murray took this trip from June 8 to July 7.

²⁶ Tyrone Power, Impressions of America During the Years 1833, 1834 and 1835 (Philadelphia, 1836), Vol. I, p. 382. Also published in London: R. Bentley, 1836.

²⁷ Darby, op. cit., p. 130.

The rolling, pastoral landscape (or at least potentially pastoral), unbroken by vivid and stark contrasts, fit the arcadian ideal as well as any other part of New York State. Augustus C. Murray was out of phase with the entire arcadian perspective in suggesting that while the lake was the "prettiest of all the lakes," it still "lack[ed] a Mont Blanc for a background."²⁸ A surrogate Mont Blanc, by adding to the grandeur and the magnificence of the area, would compromise the important qualities of a "soft landscape." Rolling hills, peaceful pastures, all on a human scale, were highly valued in the Finger Lakes.

Some tourists found time to wander south of the Genesee Road, taking John Disturnell's advice that

Cayuga Lake. . . .is a most beautiful sheet of water. . . .On several of the inlets to this lake, towards the south, are most beautiful and picturesque waterfalls, well worth the attention of lovers of natural scenery. 29

Elizabeth Ellet was extravagant, but sets the tone for an all-inclusive pastoral image of what was obviously one of her favorite parts of the New World.

A rich and beautiful scene presents itself, in the plain or vale below, and, also, on the hill-side, beyond the vale; where the smiling fields of grass and grain, sloping

²⁸Augustus C. Murray, Travels in North America, 1834-1836 (New York: Harper, 1839), pp. 247-48.

²⁹John Disturnell, A Gazetteer of the State of New York, comprising its topography, geology, mineralogical resources, civil divisions, canals, railroads, and public institutions, together with general statistics (Albany: John Disturnell, 1842), p. 108.

and verdant orchards, and wild woods, with a number of excellent farm-houses whose white painted sides form a beautiful contrast with the green fields and foliage which surround them, exhibit, altogether, a group of imagery, calculated to give birth to the most pleasing association of ideas; especially, as connected with the vale between us, and the precipice, and the rock-bordered ravine, from the center of which we contemplated this variegated scene, combining the rugged and wild majesty of Nature with the soft and mild beauty of rural cultivation and agricultural improvement. Oh! What a country! What a glorious country we do possess! How fertile the soil! How salubrious the climate! How vast in extent! How abundant in resources! And how well provided, by the God of Nature, for the preservation of all these benefits! 30

Gurney echoes these sentiments celebrating the soft, pastoral landscape. While riding on a horse along the edge of Cayuga Lake, he reflected that "without anything of the sublime, [it] is remarkable for a quiet beauty."³¹ Kemble travelled with a friend who felt moved on the basis of the scenery around Cayuga Lake to write a "sublime [and] very elegant Mohammedan description of the attributes of God!"³²

At the southern end of the lake, the town of

³⁰ Elizabeth Fries Lummis Ellet, Rambles About the Country (Boston: Marsh, Capon, Lyon and Webb, 1840), p. 128. This volume was published under the sanction of the Board of Education of the State of Massachusetts, Juvenile Series, Vol. 9.

³¹ Joseph John Gurney, A Journey in North America Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie (Norwich: Printed for Private Circulation by Joseph Fletcher, 1841), pp. 301-2.

³² Fanny Kemble (Frances Ann Butler), Journal in Two Volumes (London: John Murray, Albermarle Street, 1835), Vol. II, p. 267.

Ithaca nestled into the low, rolling hills. Besides its location, the principal scenic attractions of Ithaca were the waterfalls along Fall Creek, the major one being Ithaca Falls. The climax of a long, deep gorge, Ithaca Falls spilled the waters from the hills to the east of Ithaca onto the floodplain of Cayuga Lake. The Ithaca Falls were spectacular enough for Gurney to label them as "almost of Swiss beauty, in point of scenery."³³ Yet they did not begin to attract the numbers of tourists who flocked to the more convenient cataracts in the immediate vicinity of the Genesee Road and the Erie Canal, even though every attempt was made to lure tourists south. Using a technique similar to that employed at Kaaterskill Falls and Niagara Falls,³⁴ Disturnell reports that a tunnel had been built under one of the "several highly picturesque falls" for the use of visitors.³⁵

Elizabeth Ellet, whose romantic enthusiasm may today seem a bit extravagant and thus suspiciously inauthentic, praised Ithaca Falls most highly. Ellet's sentimental language is not "mere sentimentality," for her sensibilities and those of her era were genuine and sincere, regardless of how we may wish to view them today. Parallels to Ellet's sentimental language pervades the popular culture of the age. Pre-Civil War (and Civil War)

³³ Gurney, op. cit., p. 306.

³⁴ See chapters 4 and 8.

³⁵ Disturnell, Gazetteer, op. cit., p. 162.

parlour music, popular poetry, dime novels, hymns, folk art and other forms of popular culture also employ a similar type of language.

The sight of Ithaca Falls was apparently sufficient to spark Ellet's subdued spirituality into a flame of "reverential awe." The language she uses speaks for itself. She stood at the edge of the gorge and looked down

to contemplate, not only the sublime view of the fall, directly under us, but the vale below, stretching from the head of the Lake, through the village, and for miles beyond it, and exhibiting one of the most beautiful, as well as sublime landscapes I have ever met with. The view of the first fall is not merely beautiful, it mingles sublimity and grandeur, in a high degree; that rude grandeur, resembling primeval chaos, which art cannot reach, in her grandest designs, nor pen portray, in its loftiest flights.³⁶

Ellet appears to recognize a scale of aesthetic value, indicating that scenery may register with different intensities, which she terms "vivid[ness]" or "alive[ness]" with enthusiasm," on the "imagination of the beholder. Ellet further suggests that this heightened "enthusiasm" is simply the "God within us" coming "alive." Therefore, scenery may be evaluated according to its ability to awaken from a man-made, artificial slumber, the "God within us." Clearly, the Ithaca Falls was one of those natural wonders in New York State which, in spite of its relative obscurity, could do just that for a person with the proper

³⁶Ellet, op. cit., p. 120.

romantic sensibilities.

Casting an eye through this grand and majestic vista, the head of the lakes, with its interesting scenery, is disclosed, and heightens the effect upon the imagination of the beholder, accordingly as that is more or less vivid, -- more or less alive with enthusiasm, which Madame de Stael so briefly, beautifully and truly, describes as 'God within us.' 37

She continues by making an interesting comparison between Ithaca Falls and Kaaterskill Falls. 38

This prospect reminded me, in some degree, of the Kaaterskill Fall on Catskill Mountain; only the one terminates in the view of the lake-waters, and the other does the same, in a deep, dense, dark forest with numerous rugged heights on either side, covered with the same dark and dense forest. The Kaaterskill Falls is remarkable for its height, its amphi-theatrical form, and its awful sublimity and grandeur; and yet, I hardly know which to give the preference, as an interesting portion of natural scenery. 39

One might expect, since the Ithaca Falls were compared favorably to the Kaaterskill Falls by an American who was both educated and sensitive to the public mood, that the environs of Ithaca would have been on more fashionable itineraries. Yet such was not the case. As early as 1810, Darby sensed this, writing that

the scenery of our country has been too much neglected. Many very interesting objects in the best settled parts of the United States, are scarcely known beyond the neighborhood where they exist.

37 Ibid., pp. 120-21.

38 For Ellet on Kaaterskill Falls, see chapter 4.

39 Ellet, op. cit., p. 121.

To illustrate the point, he quoted from an unidentified publication printed in Ithaca in which the Ithaca Falls is compared favorably to the other Falls that tourists visited on their Fashionable Tours.

'The numerous magnificent cataracts in our country, have been themes of wonder and delight, and are considered as a peculiar feature of the physiography of the western part of this state. Niagara has been long viewed as the greatest natural wonder in the world -- and for sublimity and grandeur is doubtless unrivalled. . . . But the falls near this village, which is next to Niagara, do not yield in point of sublimity, beauty, and extent, to any in the state [and] are scarcely known out of their vicinity. 40

Philip Hone, one-time Mayor of New York and perhaps a little less likely to engage in upstate boosterism than an Ithaca printer, made a similar observation. The scenery was picturesque, the rocks magnificent, the trees glorious, the views exceedingly fine, the lake water pure and blue, the atmosphere clear and heavenly, yet

we travel to Europe to see lakes and scenery, climb mountains and dive into valleys in search of the picturesque, and write books about Como and Loman, Windermere and Lomond and here is a lake, beautiful and picturesque as any of them, and with much better accommodations in passing it, which I see now and enjoy for the first time. How strangely we disregard and undervalue the things which are within our reach, and most easily obtained. 41

The mystique of Europe's cultured scenery remained powerful despite the attempts of many to minimize its relevance for

⁴⁰ Darby, op. cit., p. 215.

⁴¹ Philip Hone, The Diary of Philip Hone, Edited with an introduction by Allen Nevins (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927), Vol. I, pp. 612-13.

the peculiar circumstances of the New World.

Ten miles north of Ithaca on the west side of Cayuga Lake, was another cataract, higher than Niagara Falls, yet but a wisp of water in comparison. Goodwin's Falls (also known as Taghanic, for which the modern spelling is Taughannock), from the perspective of a position downstream, became a symbol for the "soft" landscape of the Finger Lakes Region. A mere thread of water spilled off a rock ledge into an unknown mist below. Disturnell, in his role as both guide to and preserver of fashionable images, called it

the fairest, loveliest fall in all the country. Its crystal veil, as it wreathes itself in that vast gorge, is a picture of beauty worth all the journey. . . . It has no equal in its blending of the lovely water, with the gloomy gorge. 42

A contrast between the gloomy and the lovely was also identified by Ellet, although she was less reluctant to use romantic terminology.

It is amidst such sublime scenery that the fall is approached below; and when, after all this excitement, -- for the mind, which catches not the fervor of enthusiasm in rambling up this glen, must be 'fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils,' -- the falls itself bursts on your view, as you turn the last winding, you stand amazed, and still more delighted than before, by the variegated beauty of the scene. 43

Upstream, the perspective changed. No longer was the falls simply fair and lovely. From above, it was "the

⁴² Disturnell, 1864 Guide, op. cit., p. 91.

⁴³ Ellet, op. cit., p. 134.

sublimest and most thrilling thing." While his perspective was the crucial difference, not insignificant was his precarious position. It was a long way down! Candler "crept to the brink of the rock, holding by a tree while I leaned over, and surveyed the falls with a degree of terror, knowing that if my hand slipped my eyes would be closed forever."⁴⁴

The whole Finger Lakes Region, from the northern to the southern tip of these great glacial gouges, was a unit in the eyes and the minds of most fashionable tourists. Thus, the "soft" landscape on the road between Waterloo and Auburn was usually considered sufficient exposure to this region. Yet we have seen that at least two waterfalls stretched the metaphor of softness. That they were hardly known was partly because of their inconvenient location south of the path which tourists traversed en route to Niagara. Furthermore, the peacefulness of the area was ill-designed to tip fashionable travellers over the threshold of "reverential awe." In this respect, Ellet was an exception. Ellet was not the exception, however, in her pastoralism. Beaufoy, who did not visit Taughannock Falls or Ithaca Falls, suggested that Ellet's general pastoral image was typical. Enthusiasm must be distinguished from pastoral imagery.

⁴⁴ Isaac Candler, A Summary View of America: Comprising a Description of the Face of the Country, and of Several of the Principle Cities, and Remarks on the Moral, Social and Political Character of the People: Being the Result of Observation and Enquiries During a Journey in the United States (London: Printed for T. Caldwell, 1824), p. 8.

Before taking leave of the district of these lakes, I cannot help remarking, that it is in my opinion the most diversified and eligible tract of land in America. There are, it is true, no romantic rocks and precipices; few of the hills can be called high; and much of the soil is poor when compared with the alluvial flats; but then it is a healthy ever-varying scene of woods and slopes and water.⁴⁵

Returning to Geneva, seekers of the sublime and the beautiful continued their journey west. Even more than between Utica and Syracuse, the distance from Geneva to Rochester appeared as 'a dark, gloomy wilderness, eliciting only a hurried response from tourists covering the distance as rapidly and carelessly as possible. Lack of contrast was a distinguishing feature.

The land. . . .is for the greater part in the state of nature. Forests of pine, locusts, hollies, oaks and other trees extending in every direction so as to give the traveller a very limited prospect, are not so agreeable as a more open country, from the sameness of the views. The only relief to the eys is the log-house of the settler with his patch of half-cleared land, where the black stumps of trees are left to disfigure it; or spots where they are left standing like masses of charcoal, having been scathed with fire, or lying rotting on the ground overgrown with fungi. Even in a district such as this, however, the cheering view of industry encroaching on the domain of desolation is sufficient to make the solitary wanderer proceed with joyous feelings.⁴⁶

The image of newly cleared land littered with the residue of burned stumps lingered in the memory of several

⁴⁵Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 70.

⁴⁶Candler, op. cit.

wilderness as regressive, and therefore evil. Yet the dichotomy breaks down, for he admits that the initial "appearance" of Rochester was "miserable." Rochester was not a "city in the wilderness," but only a struggling outpost, a shaky framework for civilization in an irreversible relic of the wilderness.

At sunset, descending the hill, we entered upon a flat, marshy plain, on which the town of Rochester is situated. It has more the appearance of a town in a new world than any I visited, and nothing can be more miserable than its appearance from a distance. An open space has been merely burned in the forest, and the town has been run up without any attempt at getting rid of the innumerable stumps of trees, which even make their appearance in the outer streets of the place. It is, in truth, a city in the wilderness, and cannot be healthy, so long as it is surrounded by such dense, dark, forests. . . . The desolate appearance the face of the country presents can be scarcely imagined: -- large blackened trunks, and arms partly consumed by fire, lie encumbering the ground till they decay, or are again consumed by fire by some more industrious American than the generality of Americans. ⁴⁸

Timothy Bigelow, another Englishman, suggested that "stillness," usually associated with the undeveloped wilderness, characterized Rochester's most recent settlements. He drew the logical conclusion: any appellation but the wilderness for such a location was a misnomer. "A few log huts" amidst the burnt stumps "and much more explicitly the solemn stillness that prevails over them,

⁴⁸ Edward Thomas Coke, A Subaltern's Furlough: Descriptive of Scenes in Various Parts of the United States, Upper and Lower Canada, New-Brunswick and Nova Scotia, during the summer and autumn of 1832 (New York: J. J. Harper, 1833), Vol. II, pp. 18-19.

admonish you that you are in a wilderness, an unchecked wilderness."⁴⁹ What little enthusiasm penetrated the gloom was reserved for isolated pastoral oases, usually not the newly built cities, towns, and villages. One such spot was the land near Rochester farmed by Daniel Wadsworth, patriarch of the Genesee Valley. Frances Wright looked around at his

flocks and herds, luxurious pastures, and rich fields of grain, bounteous heaven ever adding to his store, and felt that, under its blessing, all is the reward of his own industry, the work, as it were, of his creation. It is a truly grateful sight to see the wilderness thus transformed into beauty; to see the human species absolved from oppression, and, with it, absolved from misery, extending their dominion, not unjustly over their fellow-creatures, but over the peaceful earth, and leaving to their posterity the well-earned fruits of their industry, and what is better, the pure example of time well-engaged. In truth, it cheers the spirits, and does the heart good to see these things. 50

These representative European images of Rochester, of a barely cultivated wilderness, were not generally shared by Americans. Of course, the large numbers of Americans who experienced the wilderness as something to conquer and who were not simply passing through, held the image of conquest foremost in their minds.⁵¹ But those

⁴⁹ Timothy Bigelow, Journal of a Tour to Niagara Falls in the year 1805 with an introduction by a grandson, Abbott Lawrence (Boston: John Wilson and Sons, 1876), p. 50.

⁵⁰ Wright, op. cit.

⁵¹ See chapter 5.

But those who were tourists and not settlers, exhibited some variation of sentiment. They tended to avoid negative aspects of the scenery, concentrating their attention on elements of the landscape more likely to be favorably reviewed. Near Rochester, Mary Murray visited

the Oak Openings. Here artists come and study; for Nature has displayed the finest moods for what is termed English gardening -- here by her skillful hand the Noble Oak, if I may so express it, are scientifically grouped, presenting clumps and points in boundless beauty and variety, with here and there a leafy Elm, rearing its graceful head as if to greet the admiring passengers.⁵²

Although many travellers passed through the environs of Rochester only once in their lifetime, those who were fortunate enough to see it develop over several years were impressed by the change in its prospect. Orsamus Turner recognized this in his early and valuable history of western New York State. Summarizing his analysis of Rochester, he concludes that

Forty years have changed Rochester from a wilderness to what it is now; and shows what can be done in a little more than forty years by the hearty enterprise of New England yeomanry. . . .A heavily timbered wilderness has been converted into a well-cultivated, well-fenced, wealthy farming town; unsurpassed by any town, in any region, of the country, in the way of neat and convenient farm houses and barns, and in the general appearance of rural happiness and independence.⁵³

⁵²Murray, op. cit., n.p.

⁵³Orsamus Turner, History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase and Morris' Reserve. . . .to which is added The Pioneer History of Monroe County (Rochester, 1851), p. 507.

Even those who did not witness the development of upstate New York with their own eyes could (and did) read and hear about it, for it was one of the most startling features of this period of New York history. Change, in spite of its constancy, always has and probably always will catch people by surprise. Furthermore, the experience of a developing landscape, whether direct or indirect, gave rise to a mode of reflection characterized by Joshua T. Smith as "sublime." On the one hand were the seemingly endless American forests -- their "great extent" and their diversity -- and on the other hand, the ever-progressing movement to remove them from the landscape. "Sublime" thoughts emerged out of the chaos of "reflecting on the past, present, and future" in the context of this situation.⁵⁴

The only natural wonder of major significance between Trenton and Rochester was Genesee Falls, a ninety foot cataract on the Genesee River. Even though such a reputable source as Disturnell minimizes its importance, it can be compared to Cohoes Falls or Little Falls, if for no other reason than that it, like Rochester itself, was a welcome relief from the monotony of the "boundless wilderness." A traveller who did not reward posterity with his or her name gives a somewhat more complete

⁵⁴ Joshua Toulmin Smith, Journal in America 1837-1838, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Floyd B. Streeter, Archivist for the Michigan Historical Commission (Metuchen, New Jersey: Printed for Charles F. Heartman, 1925), p. 14.

description than that contained in Disturnell's guide, although it is only fair to observe that this anonymous traveller viewed the Genesee Falls with a greater than usual enthusiasm.

After the Falls at Niagara, these are decidedly the grandest, as well as the most beautiful thing of the kind I have ever seen, heard, or read of. The excavated amphitheatre allows the eye to take in a circumference of nearly half a mile, . . . the variegated color of the strata, red and white, now contrasted, now softened into each other, interspersed here and there in the midst of the rock, afford a contrast of object and of tint so warm and cheerful, so rich and glowing, that I know of nothing to be compared with it. The eye takes in this delightful scene at the same time with the immense cascade that terminates the view, a view so intermingling the beautiful with the sublime that it will bear the contemplation of an amateur even after the Falls at
Niagara. 55

One of the attractions of Genesee Falls was that, as at Trenton, there was plenty of room for circulation around the Falls, with the resultant possibility of viewing it from several different locations and angles. As with Taughannock, this gave rise to various and diverse images. Furthermore, those easily bored with the single view were encouraged thereby to extend their stay at the Falls. Beaufoy hints at these advantages as well as the reason why Genesee Falls was not better received by tourists who were almost driven by it, willy-nilly, on their way to or return from Niagara Falls. It is a reason which is echoed

⁵⁵T. C., A Ride to Niagara in 1809 (Rochester, New York: Two hundred copies reprinted from the original for George P. Humphrey, 1915), p. 30.

in even stronger terms by other visitors.

The falls would be extremely picturesque had not the timber on its immediate banks been cut down; but settlers in the wilderness of woods have a natural antipathy to the sight of a tree, and the axe levels all without distinction. . . .A ramble down the banks of the stream, which are very steep and woody, is highly interesting, as new and pleasant views of the cataract can continually be obtained through the foliage. . . .This is the finest scene of the kind I have ever witnessed; and much enhanced by fishermen below with their 56
nets and hooks.

Human intervention had compromised the Genesee Falls' value as a natural wonder. Beaufoy misses the larger implications of his observation that the banks had been stripped of trees. Others were not so hesitant to identify uncontrolled technology as the source of their unease at Genesee Falls. Americans and Europeans alike claimed that Rochester had lost something in allowing the power of the Genesee to be tapped in an unplanned fashion. Thomas Hamilton "strolled out one evening" to observe that "sundry saw and corn mills ha[d] destroyed the romantic interest which invested it in the days when the cataract blew his trumpet from the steep amid the stillness of the surrounding forest."⁵⁷ For Caroline Gilman, the Falls were a spot of "magnificent beauty, but man is doing all he can to mar it." Even so, she saw "the most beautiful rainbow" imaginable through the mist created by the falling water,

⁵⁶ Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 77.

⁵⁷ Thomas Hamilton, op. cit., p. 307.

and compared it to other rainbows in her repertoire of natural wonders. "I feel a complacency in gazing on these softeners of waterfalls; they speak a language amid the rush and tumult like that conveyed by the bow in the heavens after a storm."⁵⁸

Charles Mackay also bemoaned the invasion of technology at Genesee Falls. Yet in contrast to Hamilton and Gilman, he refused to let the "disfigured banks" influence his image of the "great falls itself." Attempting to mitigate the influence of technology, Mackay discounts the possibility that the hand of man can substantially influence the "rush of the mighty river." This type of naïveté is unfortunately still with us. Mackay would be shocked to see the Genesee River today, just as we profess shock at the environmental havoc wrecked by continued industrial expansion and exploitation.

On a subsequent occasion, I stopped a night at Rochester to view the fall. When this part of the world was a wilderness, the Genesee must have been eminently grand and beautiful. Even now, when there is not a tree upon the banks, and filched from the great falls itself, a hundred little streams, . . . the rush of the mighty river is a noble sight. Man has disfigured the banks, but the stream itself is not only too unmanageable to be brought into subjection to his uses, but too vast in its loveliness and grandeur to be sensibly impaired, or made other than beautiful,⁵⁹ whatever he may do to it.

⁵⁸ Caroline Gilman, The Poetry of Travelling in the United States With Additional Sketches by a Few Friends and a Week Among Autographs by Rev. S. Gilman (New York: S. Colman, 1838), p. 103.

⁵⁹ Mackay, op. cit., p. 50.

More typical than Mackay's belief in the limits of technology was a combination of confusion as to the proper role of technology and the naïve hope that more technology would produce the best of all possible worlds. Exemplifying the confusion was the expressed affection for the Genesee Falls as an undeveloped natural wonder juxtaposed with the realization that its natural state would be obsolete for the Rochester aborning. Tourists were understandably reluctant to invest much of their emotional selves in a natural wonder only to see it destroyed before their eyes. The only way tourists could begin to reconcile this conflict was by putting their faith in the value of technology, whether justified by their experience or not. The "machine in the garden" was an unavoidable reality, yet an adequate perspective for understanding the phenomenon was unavailable to most tourists. Frances Trollope's experience at Genesee Falls symbolizes the curious combination of confusion and hope which many persons brought to examples of machinery in the garden.

The Falls of the Genesee is close to the town, and in the course of a few months, will perhaps be in the middle of it. It is a noble sheet of water. . . .but I looked at it through the window of a factory, and as I did not like that, I was obligingly handed to the door-way of a saw-mill; in short, 'the great water privilege' has been so ingeniously taken advantage of, that no point can be found where its voice and its movement are not mixed and confounded with those of the admirable machinery of 60 the flourishing city.

60 Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans edited with an historical introduction by Donald Smalley (New York: First Borzoi Edition by Alfred A. Knopf, 1949),

With the exception of Portage Falls, a cataract on the Genesee River in the town of Portage, Genesee Falls was the last natural wonder of any significance encountered by pilgrims en route to Niagara Falls.⁶¹ Westward travellers now entered the last phase of the long and

Vol. II, p. 251. This volume was first published in London: Whittaker, Treacher and Company, 1832.

⁶¹The Falls at Portage, New York were enough removed from the road to Niagara that, in spite of their considerable size and extent, they were not well known to tourists. Not only were there falls, but a gorge through which the Genesee River ran was considered by many to be as spectacular as the falls. However, the pressure to develop the area around the falls was not as intense as at, for example, Genesee Falls. As John W. Barber put it in 1841, "Fortunately for visitors, as yet the scene has been permitted by man to remain in a state of nature. It is therefore as wild and romantic as can be desired" [John W. Barber and Irving Howe, Historical Collections of the State of New York; Containing A General Collection of the Most Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, etc. Relating to Its History and Antiquities with Geographical Descriptions of Every Township in the State (New York: Published for the authors by S. Tuttle, 1841), p. 65.] Disturnell, with his accustomed thoroughness and reliability, indicated that there were

three distinct falls on the river, respectively 60, 90, and 110 feet, within the space of two miles, each differing in character and each having peculiar beauties Although the cascades are highly admirable, they are almost disregarded in the wonder and fear caused by the stupendous, perpendicular walls of the river, rising to 400 feet in height, and extending along the river for 3 miles, with almost as much regularity as if constructed by art. To this great depth, the river has worn its bed in solid rock, in turns as short and graceful as if winding through the softest meadows.

[John Disturnell, Springs, Waterfalls, Sea-Bathing Resorts and Mountain Scenery of the United States and Canada (New York: John Disturnell, 1855), p. 105]

tiring journey to Niagara. Somewhat to their surprise, since overland travel options had heretofore been limited, they now had a choice of travelling along Lake Ontario on the "Ridgeway" or travelling through the inland city of Batavia. There appeared to be no particular preference by travellers for one path over the other, and Lake Ontario itself seems to have excited no particular enthusiasm. By this point, Niagara Falls was uppermost in their minds.

The "Alluvial Way," "Ridgeroad" or "Ridgeway" was "generally supposed to have been the beach of Lake Ontario."⁶² But since the Lake had receded, it was just another path through the wilderness, with only occasional glimpses of the lake. On either side, the forest clung close to the road; tourists felt both trapped and isolated in pursuing their course along it. Yet their response was less negative than we might expect. Beaufoy seemed genuinely enthusiastic about the "solemn magnificence" of the "untouched wilderness."

I had an opportunity of seeing the wilderness of 'bush' untouched by man, in all its solemn magnificence. . . . To the right and to the left, it seemed as if a fowl could not make way; so thick it was indeed, as to check the rank vegetation natural to damp, swampy ground. The forest is composed of a variety of species. Oak, elm, beech, maple, and other deciduous trees generally cover the better soil; cedar and larch are found in the most marshy places; the hemlock-fir, and pine, in the rocky sandy tracts. 63

⁶²Dorr, op. cit., p. 10.

⁶³Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 80.

An anonymous traveller waxes sentimental with what seems to be an adequate summary of the average tourist's experience of travelling to Niagara Falls, and puts the Ridgeway Road in its proper context -- a lingering (or it could have been a projected) vision of Niagara Falls. It is difficult to overestimate the pull this natural wonder had on the hearts and minds of travellers. Other natural wonders pale by comparison.

It seems to me that when old mother Nature, after having perfected the gigantic cataract originally begun at Lewiston, was so tickled and delighted with her production, that she resolved to make a pathway for the children of men to come and see her prodigy -- accordingly, she went to work and made this beautiful turn-pike of from eight to twelve rods wide, of hard gravel and sand, through a low country of swamp and clay -- and said to the children of men, 'Travel, behold and wonder!' 64

The southern route went through Batavia. Complaints about the dense and forested inland route were not specifically about the uncomfortable trip, but focussed on the depressingly wild environment through which they travelled. Trollope's report is unusual only because she did not complain of a "dreary" wilderness. "Our journey now became wilder every step, the unbroken forest often skirted the road for miles, and the sight of a log-hut was an event."⁶⁵ Kemble provided more detail, but she found

64 _____, Notes of a Tour Through the Western Part of the State of New York in 1829 (Rochester, New York: Two hundred copies printed in 1916 for George P. Humphrey, 1916), p. 45.

⁶⁵Trollope, op. cit., p. 220.

evidence that settlers had already swept through the area, although she is not clear as to whether they remained or whether in some cases they had moved to greener pastures further west.

The country through which we journeyed today was wilder and less cultivated than any we have yet seen. A great deal of forest land, consisting of close, thin, tall, second growth, springing around the stump of many a huge tree; thick tangled underwood; marshy and damp, green wilderness, where the grass and bushes trailed about in rank luxuriance; and piles of felled timber, with here and there a root yet smoking, bore witness to the first inroads of human cultivation. None of the trees that were standing were of any girth, or comparable in size or beauty to our park trees; but some of the stumps were of large size and must have been the foundations of noble forest pillars. 66

The most significant discussion of the inland road to Niagara came from a pen of an American. The road was "pretty good" for the first five miles out of Rochester, then became "a very Bad" combination of "Causeway, big logs and deep mud holes." Mary Murray found relief from this muddy morass in some "remarkably fine" timber, and "pretty, temporary lakes and ponds where they sometimes grow wheat," although she generally saw "nothing worthy of remark save the Badness of the Road and Tonawanda Creek which beautifully winds along to cheer the gloom of the wilderness." Two exceptions, however, broke the dull void. Both were surprises -- bonuses for a trip with significant hardships. The first was

⁶⁶Kemble, op. cit., p. 281.

one of the most curious and most romantic Falls I had ever beheld. I do not believe it is known to travellers generally, as our driver had never heard of it. . . .The water falls from a considerable height, and after pitching three times, it reappears in an opening with incredible beauty. . . .2 mills also vary the scene and complete the Picture.

The other curiosity Murray had first seen with "precious pleasure" just east of Rochester: "Oak openings." "To see in a wilderness the velvet lawn of the nobleman, enriched with trees grouped and displayed with far more beauty and effect than the most skillful artist could produce -- is something so [illegible] as to strike the admiring spectator with astonishment."⁶⁷ These two curiosities lay to rest Thomas Hamilton's complaint that he knew "little which merits record in the journey to Lockport."

Lockport was the last of the series of unique and often bizzare places travellers visited along the road to Niagara. Frances Trollope suggests why Lockport was the "strangest place" she ever visited.

As fast as half a dozen trees were cut down, a factory was raised up; stumps still contest the ground with pillars and porticos are seen to struggle with rocks. It looks as if the demon of machinery, having invaded the peaceful domains of nature, had fixed on Lockport as the battleground on which they should strive for mastery. The fiend insists that the streams should go one way, though the gentle mother had ever led their dancing steps another; nay, the very rocks must fall before him, and take what form he wills.

⁶⁷Mary Murray, op. cit., n. p.

The battle is lost, and won. Nature is firmly routed and driven from the field, and the rattling, crackling, hissing, spitting demon has taken possession of Lockport forever. ⁶⁸

Fanny Kemble agreed. She saw a "collection of new white houses that looked as though they were this very instant finished standing in a half-cleared wilderness." "Half-savage looking yet," the country presented a "sort of forest stubbleland -- a very desolate looking thing indeed." ⁶⁹

Not to belabor but only to emphasize the point that romantic images did not necessarily emerge from romantic souls, for Henry Addington, the barely cultivated wilderness was worse than the untamed wilderness. He had almost reached Niagara, but anticipation was not enough to allay his profound disgust with the landscape he saw.

All the country was little better than a wooded desert, with a log hut or two scattered here and there amidst self-styled fields barely reduced from a state of pure barbarism, and showing, few and far between, a rank crop of corn shooting up amidst blackened stumps of trees half burned down, and enclosed with rude zigzag fences (the most frightful and frequent eyesore of a North American landscape) to prevent the cattle from losing themselves in the measureless woods on all sides. . . . A more tangible scene of painful desolation the mind can hardly picture to itself. A positive waste is less hideous than an American district emerging into the forest elements of cultivation, where the struggles making to conquer the wild vigor of nature as displayed in rank herbage and impenetrable thickets only render her naked deformity more frightful, until clothed afresh with an

⁶⁸Trollope, op. cit., pp. 252-53.

⁶⁹Kemble, op. cit., p. 282.

attire more suited to the eye and feelings⁷⁰
of humanity.

In the course of examining many diverse and complex landscapes, both in the Hudson River Valley and across New York State, I have observed that feelings of awe and wonder were usually triggered by an experience of the natural world which the viewer described as "sublime." The elusive mystery of that nineteenth century catchall -- the "sublime" -- haunted the minds and hearts of those who travelled to natural wonders searching for romantic release. Furthermore, the accolade of "sublimity," including the prospect of "reverential awe," was reserved for selected natural wonders. This is not to say either that the term "sublime" was used only with respect to selected natural wonders, or that feelings of "reverential awe" were appropriate only at specified natural wonders. Rather, the popular sensibility was designed and programmed by the prevailing cultural mood, to accord sublimity and the possibility of "reverential awe" chiefly to those which met the unwritten aesthetic standard.

All across New York State, but especially west of Trenton Falls, a reservoir of subdued spiritual yearning churned unsatisfied as tourists hurried with anticipation towards Niagara Falls. They fully expected to see religion

⁷⁰Henry Unwin Addington, Youthful America: Selections from Henry Unwin Addington's Residence in the United States of America, 1822, 1823, 1824, 1825, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Bradford Perkins (Berkeley, California: The University of California Press, 1960), p. 71.

in the operations of the great cataract and were frustrated by the meagre hints en route. The smaller cataracts to which tourists gravitated in search of a contrast to the monotony of the wilderness and to which they were more sensitive because of Niagara Falls, left tourists with a lingering sense of unfulfilled expectations which only served to deepen anticipation for Niagara Falls. Tourists felt a deep spiritual yearning, largely unexpressed in any tangible artifact in prose, poetry or painting. Nevertheless, a mysterious longing hung in the air of the tourists who traversed the state of New York. In part it was fueled by expectation, but it was also part of the make-up of those fashionable tourists molded, directly or indirectly, by Scottish aesthetics and Romanticism.⁷¹

A definition of a "natural wonder" would be easily accomplished by limiting the term to natural phenomena which had the capacity to elicit "reverential awe." But what is that capacity? Similar to defining the sublime, this issue is not subject to any simple analysis. What can be said is that:

(1) There was a select body of natural scenes and sites which virtually every traveller recognized as natural wonders. Trenton Falls and the view from Pine Orchard were well known to the travelling public as natural wonders.

(2) There was also a sizeable proportion of the landscape which travellers disliked, for reasons ranging

⁷¹See chapter 1.

from the negative influence of technology on the wilderness to the dense, dark monotony of the landscape. Sometimes the reasons were not directly attributable to specific features of the wilderness, but were a general response to the wilderness. Examples are numerous: the desire of tourists for the comforts of civilization when they were least available or the company of friends when they were the most distant. In western New York State, where the road was rough and the journey bruising, and where there were few well-defined natural wonders to distract tourists from their discomfort, tourists vented their frustrations on the seemingly boundless wilderness. For example, Nathaniel Parker Willis, who claimed to be a devotee of nature in its primitive state, groaned his misery when put in a situation with which he was uncomfortable.

Alone! alone! How drear it is
 Always to be alone!
 In such a depth of wilderness,
 The only thinking one!
 The waters in their path rejoice,
 The trees together sleep--
 But I have not one silver voice
 Upon my ear to creep!

The sun upon the silent hills
 His mesh of beauty weaves,
 There's music in the laughing rills
 And in the whispering leaves.
 The red deer like the breezes fly
 To meet the bounding roe
 But I have not a human sigh
 To cheer me as I go. 72

⁷² Nathaniel Parker Willis, Complete Poems with a Memoir by the Author (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1891), p. 278. This poem is entitled "The Solitary."

(3) Between the two extremes were a variety of landscapes which neither provoked the wrath of travellers nor evoked their wonder. They were sometimes ignored, sometimes highly praised, but most often merely noted with aesthetic neutrality. A good example is the "soft" landscape of the Finger Lakes Region -- peaceful, relaxing and highly attractive, yet not sublime. Oak openings, minor waterfalls and placid sheets of water also fit this category. How are we to evaluate these landscapes? Specifically, what can we say about their relationship to the whole complex of feelings which we have identified using such terms as "reverential awe," sublimity and wonder? It seems to me that the "soft" landscapes, appreciated and praised only modestly, functioned aesthetically as tempters or hints of things to come. The responses they elicited arose from that same reservoir of spirituality which bubbled over in the face of recognized natural wonders.

As has been apparent in so many ways, the context for the entire tourists' journey across New York State and particularly west from Trenton Falls was the anticipation of Niagara Falls. It would be stretching the evidence to say that tourists enjoyed the trip from Utica to Niagara. But given travelling conditions, they were forced to spend a good deal of time in transit, and were determined to make the best of it. When the going was bad, it was very bad, and they usually said as much. When

it was boring, they said that too. Compared with the ease of travelling up the Hudson River and the numerous natural diversions between Albany and Utica, the trip from Utica to Niagara was inferior. There was very little to absorb their attention, or so they thought, so intent were they on reaching their chosen destination. Had the reputation of Niagara not been so extravagant, it is probable that some tourists would have chosen to stay behind at a lesser "watering place" such as Trenton Falls.

The trip from Trenton to Niagara -- a lull before the storm -- provides a context for the enthusiasm which greeted the Falls. Just as Rochester was seen as a "city in the wilderness" because it provided such relief from the coach trip from Geneva, the aesthetic slumber induced by the "soft" landscape, the soft beauty of New York's midriff, needed to be pierced by a bolt of the sublime to awaken the "God within." Niagara Falls did precisely that. We have travelled. Now we move on to behold and wonder at the climax of the Fashionable Tour.

Chapter 8:
Niagara Falls

I. Introduction

Tourists had journeyed a long way, through dark, swampy forests, over rut-filled byways, seeking rest and nourishment in filthy, overcrowded inns, conditions designed to make even the strong in heart and stomach wonder whether the trip was worth the bother. For forty days and forty nights, their determination to reach the celebrated Niagara Falls was on trial. Gentlemanly reserve masked real feelings: Frederick deRoos merely "made great sacrifices and encountered some difficulties."¹ Like this stoic Englishman, a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, most pilgrims accepted their uncomfortable fate as a legitimate price to pay for the promised glories as yet unseen. Thus Thomas Moore (1779-1852), Ireland's beloved poet, in his characteristically efficient style remarked: "you may guess at the cheapness of the inns in this country. . . .but powerful curiosity sweetens all difficulties."² Suffering helped to exorcise the demons of a man-made civilization and prepare pilgrims for the primordial wonder of the wilderness. At the Falls of Niagara, in contrast to the changing landscape of their everyday lives, Nature, displaying the eternal glory of God, was

¹Frederick deRoos, Personal Narrative of Travels in the United States and Canada in 1826 (London: William H. Ainsworth, 1827), pp. 173-4.

²Thomas Moore, Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence, Edited by Lord John Russell (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans), p. 79.

majestic and forever triumphant over the insignificant works of man.

Although early nineteenth century long-distance travelling was treacherous and uncomfortable by modern standards, Niagara Falls remained relatively accessible to the populous Atlantic seaboard. Furthermore, the vast splendors of the North American west were known to only a few adventurous easterners until after the Civil War, when American soldiers and frontiersmen made the plains safe for democracy. Yet the relative ease of access and the ignorance of alternative wonders can not explain the underlying reason for Niagara's popularity. Neither

the acquisition of wealth, nor the debate of a legislative assembly draws him thither, but the attractions that allure him are a combination of many of the most astounding features of nature, the rich painted landscape, whose outline was traced by the HAND by whom the world was framed, and whose strong contour has and will endure through the changes of countless centuries. 3

By 1825, nothing compared with the beauty and sublimity of this natural wonder in the eyes and imaginations of western poets, essayists, tourists and artists.⁴ "No

³ William Darby, A Tour from the City of New York to Detroit (Chicago, Illinois: American Classics Series, Quadrangle Books, 1962), pp. 167-8. This volume was originally published in 1819. Darby's tour lasted from May 2, 1818 to September 22, 1818.

⁴ I shall not analyze the hundreds of paintings, and etchings of Niagara Falls by artists both professional and amateur. Cole, Church, Vanderlyn, Ellicott, Bennett, Hick and others, known and unknown, recorded their reverence for Niagara with pencil instead of pen. I want to emphasize that their productions are artistically rich and

distance, however great, should prevent a person from visiting the Falls: whoever has seen it may safely say that he has seen the greatest natural wonder in the world and then rest satisfied."⁵

The importance of Niagara Falls is suggested by several factors. Even granting exaggerations fueled by romantic enthusiasm and the hope of commercial gain, tourists reportedly visited the most remarkable water wonder in the New World in astonishing numbers. And the numbers increased each year. In 1835, Horatio Parsons estimated that "from twelve to fifteen thousand annually" visited the Falls.⁶ DeVeaux estimated that twenty thousand visited the Falls in 1838, thirty thousand in 1839 and thirty thousand during the economically troubled 1840. "The great rush of American travellers"⁷ was most felt during the summer months when hotels and rooming houses were booked solid.

Not only were there great numbers of people; there

historically valuable and their significance should not be underestimated by their absence from this study. Similarly, work needs to be done on the music written at and about Niagara Falls.

⁵C. D. Arfwedson, The United States and Canada, in 1832, 1833, and 1834 (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1834), Vol. II, p. 317.

⁶Horatio Parsons, A Guide to Travellers Visiting the Falls of Niagara, Second edition, greatly enlarged (Buffalo: Oliver G. Steele, 1835), p. 82. The first edition was published in 1834. Later this book was called Steele's Book of Niagara Falls, the tenth edition of which was published by Oliver G. Steele in 1847!

⁷deRoos, op. cit., p. 181.

was a great variety of people as well, "the fashionable, opulent and learned. . . .from all countries."⁸ Parsons glanced at the hotel registry one summer morning and discovered that

There were three foreign Consuls, a Swiss Colonel, two of Bonaparte's Legion of Honor; Hamburg, Madrass, Ceylon, Sidney (N. S. Wales), British, Spanish and Haytien merchants, a family from Constantinople, gentlemen of various professions from Berlin, Moscow, Madrid, Madeira and Malta; five from Ireland, three from Scotland, four from Englandexiled monarchs and foreign 9 ambassadors

from the Old World. From the New World, every class of society and all political persuasions were represented, as well as a "good proportion of female worthies."¹⁰

"There were no literary or professional men" registered at Caroline Gilman's hotel in 1830. And her fellow carriage-mates to Niagara Falls were equally diverse, illustrating the American

cacoëthes for travelling. There was a lady accompanying two lads, her sons, on their vacation, and a young man from a strawbonnet establishment in the Eastern states and our own party, all rushing to the Falls, as a matter of taste. 11

The tourists who flooded Niagara produced nothing

⁸Parsons, op. cit., p. 182.

⁹Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Caroline Gilman, The Poetry of Travelling in the United States With Additional Sketches by a Few Friends and a Week among Autographs by Rev. S. Gilman (New York: S. Colman, 1838), p. 89.

less than a torrent of literary miscellany in preserving their impressions and reactions for posterity. Niagara Falls was a mecca for diarists and poets alike. Undiscovered talents sharpened their literary spurs at Niagara, hoping that the experience would be both an inspiration and a ticket to fame. But few reputations were established and many dilettantes were humbled, judging from the awesome amount of transparently superficial rhetoric -- as overwhelming to this reader as the cataract was to the tourist-authors. And to say that the descriptions are "repetitious" is an understatement.¹² The flood-tide of romantic rhetoric by visitors awed by the Almighty's topographical gymnastics might be best described as "O ye's" followed by a most extraordinary combination of romantic sentiment and supposed religious piety. Even lesser poets unfamiliar with the language of Scottish Common Sense Realism and British Romanticism, tested their mettle at Niagara Falls, as witness this early swain.

On Table Rock we did embrace
And there we stood both face to face.
The moon was up, the wind was high --
I kissed her, she kissed I! 13

His behavior and his grammar were both severely strained by the experience.

¹² Donald Braider, The Niagara (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 223. This volume is in the Rivers of America Series.

¹³ Theodora Vinal, Niagara Portage: From Past to Present (Buffalo: Foster and Stewart Publishing Corporation, 1949), p. 1. Vinal quotes an anonymous nineteenth century "swain."

In introducing Niagara Falls, it is most important to analyze the introductions pilgrims themselves gave. Thomas Moore estimated that preparation and anticipation played a large role in tourist's images of Niagara Falls. Tourists prepared for the grand cataract in the same ways they prepared for all natural wonders -- by viewing sketches of the Falls, reading descriptions of and poetry about the Falls, "gathering testimony from eyewitnesses,"¹⁴ and of course perusing the numerous guidebooks.¹⁵ The

¹⁴James Dixon, D.D., Personal Narratives of a Tour Through Part of the United States and Canada in 1849 (New York: Lane and Scott, 1849), p. 113. Dixon was a British Wesleyan.

¹⁵Not only did tourists prepare for recommended guidebook jaunts, but "living guides" "offered themselves" to tourists for a modest fee. "The aid of a guide is indispensable, to point out the different views, and to impart a full knowledge of all the localities." (Samuel DeVeaux, The Traveller's Own Guide to Saratoga Springs, Niagara Falls and Canada Containing Routes, Distances, Conveyances, Expenses, Use of Mineral Waters, Baths, Description of Scenery, etc. A Complete Guide for the Valetudinarian and for the Tourist, Seeking for Pleasure and Amusements. With Maps and Engravings (Buffalo: Faxon and Read, 1841), p. 103.) The foremost "living guide" of the day was a Mr. Hooker, whose surname aptly described his profession. As the "first person to become a guide to strangers," he became a celebrated wonder in himself. Not many persons had guided "individuals from almost every nation of the globe: Turks, Jews, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Chinese; ex-kings, princes and noblemen; bishops and priests, loco-focos and Whigs; besides the 'two Fannys!'" (Ibid., p. 134.) Others also offered themselves to tourists, but their exploits are not as well recorded as those of Mr. Hooker. The obvious reason? -- Robert Playfair devised what was probably the most successful method for minimizing the bothersomeness of intruding guides. On his arrival, he noticed "a certain rotation of sightseeing to be gone through. . . .the proper machinery being in attendance. . . .To this we resigned ourselves, and so having paid our footing as it were, we found ourselves quietly dropped, and free to go to work in our own way."

results were usually highly satisfactory to tourists, but not always. Englishman James Dixon (1814-1873) expected to see scenery "bold, lofty, sublime -- whereas it was perfectly level."¹⁶ Preparation tended to fix images, even "false impressions" and "mental errors." To assure acceptance of the Falls, some tourists had to concentrate on leaving "every avenue to the soul open to the inspiration of the moment, whether of surprise, or rapture, or of awe."¹⁷ "Presuppositions," to use Dixon's term, were

unfavorable to first impressions, to a full admission of fine feelings, of lofty sentiments, or even real, and adequate conceptions. These pre-suppositions, in my case, I found to be all untrue; they had all to be removed from my mind even before the grandeurs which I beheld, which stood arrayed before me in all their majesty and glory, could produce any accurate ideal and excite any corresponding ¹⁸ emotion.

E. T. Coke (1807-1888) gathered "testimony from witnesses" in addition to the published sources. The effect of this preparation was to diminish his anticipation and thereby heighten his excitement on discovering his "prepossessions" to be "untrue."

Everyone with whom I had previously conversed upon the subject most carefully impressed upon me that I should be disappointed. . . .Therefore I had

(Robert Playfair, Recollections of a Visit to the United States and the British Provinces of North America (Edinburgh: T. Constable and Company, 1856 , p. 56).

¹⁶Dixon, op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁸Ibid.

prepared myself to meet the disappointment with calmness and resignation, recalling to my mind all the penny prints I had seen in my childhood, representing the pine tops, the bare rocks with a solitary goat, or an Indian perched upon a promontory, and a smooth sheet of water rolling over the side. 19

Coke gazed upon Niagara "hour after hour," and finally "condemned those who told [him] that [he] should be disappointed as having no taste, and found fault with every living and dead author for not having sufficiently praised them."²⁰ Like Coke, most tourists easily resolved whatever conflict existed between "prepossessions" and reality on discovering that the "reality exceeded the expectation."²¹ Usually, however, there was no such conflict.

Anticipation blossomed into a flower more complex and seemingly unrelated to the seeds of preparation. Thomas Moore, even before visiting the Falls, determined that Niagara would be an "era in [his] life;" Robert Playfair proceeded to the Falls "on the tip of expectation;"²² Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose "treasury of

¹⁹E. T. Coke, A Subaltern's Furlough: Descriptive of Scenes in Various Parts of the United States, Upper and Lower Canada, New-Brunswick and Nova Scotia, during the summer and autumn of 1832 (New York: J. J. Harper, 1833), Vol. II, p. 42.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828 (Edinburgh: Printed for R. Cadell, 1830), Vol. I, p. 182.

²²Playfair, op. cit., p. 54.

anticipated enjoyments, comprising all the wonders of the world, had nothing else so magnificent" as Niagara, claimed that "never did a pilgrim approach Niagara with deeper enthusiasm."²³

Anticipation surrounded the obligatory reading of books and viewing of sketches, for most persons believed that Niagara was beyond words and beyond sketches, that "it was not within the power of man to describe and paint the Falls in true colors." Arfwedson had this notion imprinted in his memory during a walk in New York City just prior to visiting the Falls. He and his "native American" companion paused at a bookshop where "several excellent drawings" of Niagara were being displayed in the window. When he exclaimed in delight at the drawings, his companion "eyed [him] a long while with a penetrating look, and sneered at last, 'You have not seen Niagara,' and then cut short his conversation."²⁴ Some persons even considered it a sacrilege to attempt to depict Niagara by word, by pen, or by pencil!

Primacy and mystery were the principal elements which primed tourist's anticipation. Fanny Kemble remembered hearing a gentleman say that the Falls "was the only sight in the world which had not disappointed"²⁵ him.

²³Braider, op. cit., p. 201.

²⁴Arfwedson, op. cit., p. 315.

²⁵Frances Anne (Fanny) Kemble, Journal, 1832-1834 (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1835), Vol. II, p. 285.

Basil Hall recalled his preparation for certain "remarkable objects in various corners of the globe very early in life," and noted that Niagara occupied the "principal station in this list."²⁶ This status was supported by a relative lack of "delightful aids to the taste and judgment," where "everything was new, and nothing arranged nor even any approach to classification attempted" compared with the accumulated materials on "Italy, or any other old country," where "every picture, statue, or ruin worthy of notice, is recorded and brought to the traveller's notice in spite of him."²⁷ Lack of both historical association and adequate descriptions heightened the images of primacy and mystery.

But anticipation involved more than "prepossession," primacy and mystery. Anxiety, fear and dread accompanied pilgrims during the last section of their difficult journey. With such an intense buildup, it is not difficult to understand the pilgrims' reluctance to expose their cherished image of Niagara to a potentially different and lesser reality. Such a reluctance to test images against the real world is normal; conflict and change are thereby kept at bay.

The "deep, long and awful roar of the cataract" dramatized William Darby's trauma on approaching the Falls. His "mind which for years had dwelt with

²⁶Hall, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 182.

²⁷Ibid., p. 209.

anticipation upon the greatest of the world's traits, approached the scene with fearful solicitude."²⁸ DeRoos complained of "intense anxiety."²⁹ Charles Mackay skillfully suggested that the extent and depth of both preparation and anticipation gave rise to the fears of visitors which no one claimed to have adequately explained. "I was positively pervaded, permeated, steeped, and bathed in a longing desire to behold it; and my fears but arose from the excess of my life."³⁰ Before even seeing the Falls, Mackay "determined. . . .whether rain, hail or snow -- to gaze upon this wonder of creation while yet it was in my power, and to hear that great voice preaching in the wilderness, and singing forever and ever the old and eternal hymn, 'God is great!'"³¹

The importance of preparation and anticipation to the images of Niagara Falls are well summarized in a poem by Mary Murray, an American citywoman who visited the Falls as early as 1805. The reader is initially put at ease by the image of a boat smoothly sailing up the Hudson. Yet a mood of expectancy interrupts the established peacefulness and it is clear where the author is going. Images of Niagara take priority over the entire journey from New

²⁸Darby, op. cit., pp. 160-1.

²⁹deRoos, op. cit., p. 173.

³⁰Charles Mackay, Life and Liberty in America (New York, 1859), p. 48.

³¹Ibid.

York to the Falls. This poem identifies, in a forceful way, the mood of anticipation, exciting, mysterious, and dreadful, which hung in the hearts of those who set out for Niagara. We shall see these sentiments transposed into reverence and wonder at the Falls themselves.

With favoring breeze, the graceful vessel glides
 And o'er the moving waves majestic rides
 Her sails all bent:
 While expectation in my bosom knocks,
 Pointing to where; o'er high terrific rocks
 With force unspent
 The cataract dashes; where with horrid roar
 Niagara sweeps down with matchless powers
 In majestic sublime
 While little mortals stand and gaze in awe;
 Or panic struck their dazzled eyes withdraw,
 Fearful the steep to climb.
 Niagara holds undivided sway:
 No other objects round my fancy play:
 Niagara alone,
 Supreme in grandeur, single in its kind
 Usurp the total empire of the mind. ³²
 The great sublime unknown.

Along the Hudson River and across New York State, we have observed that general unadvertised landscapes as well as the immediate environment of particular natural wonders were significant iconological features of the wilderness journey to the great water wonder. How did tourists view the immediate environment of Niagara Falls? With rare exceptions, it was not considered on its own merit. Basil Hall considered the scenery "of itself, of little or no interest."³³ He thought it best that

³²Mary Murray, Journal of a Tour from New York to Niagara (Unpublished manuscript in the New-York Historical Society) no pagination. This "tour" took place from June 8 to July 7, 1805.

³³Hall, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 190.

way, because "any scenery which would be in keeping with the grand object which gives its character to this wonderful spot, would, in all probability, diminish the effect produced by its standing entirely on its own."³⁴ Most important was the scenery's appropriateness. Yet without specific physical requirements, any scene could be justified. If the scenery was viewed as beautiful and/or sublime, it complemented the Falls; if it was viewed as mundane and unappealing, it was presumably designed that way so as not to compete with the water wonder.

In fact, tourists did make such opposite evaluations and interpretations. Robert Playfair labelled the land surrounding Niagara as "in no way picturesque;" the "great features of the celebrated Falls were very much confined to the cataracts themselves."³⁵ William Darby said it in stronger terms.

There is nothing near Niagara that is striking in its scenery. It is left alone in simple and sublime dignity to strike the soul with a sensation that loss of life or sense alone can obliterate, the nature of which no language can convey. If towery mountains and craggy rocks surrounded Niagara, I cannot but believe that much of its fine effect would be lost; as it exists, it is an image whose whole contour is at once seen, and the recollection unbroken by extraneous objects; even sound is subservient to the impression made upon the heart. None is heard except the eternal roar of the cataract.³⁶

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Playfair, op. cit., p. 58.

³⁶Darby, op. cit., p. 164.

Even trees on the banks of the river compromised the sublimity of the Falls. Though they "sink away in insignificance" in comparison with the cataract, David Wilkie suggested that "as the diamond is set in metal of the least gaudy hue, so we really believe the true sublimity of the Falls would be heightened were the soil shorn around of the leafy fringe which decks the verge of the stream."³⁷ Ideally, nothing should detract "the slightest part of our attention from the simple, but sublime spectacle."³⁸ "Nature has no doubt ordered it, that Niagara. . . might appear to more advantage from the powers of contrast."³⁹

Hall, Darby and Wilkie represent only one point of view. Less developed was the feeling that the scenery complemented the Falls. "The lovely reaching to the sublime,"⁴⁰ "grand, striking and unique. . . just what it should be."⁴¹ Englishman J. S. Buckingham valued the Niagara frontier more than any other visitor I have read.

³⁷ David Wilkie, Sketches of a Summer Trip to New York and Canada (Edinburgh: J. Anderson, 1837), p. 102. Wilkie was an artist of some note, but should not be confused with the famous artist of the same name. Wilkie visited the United States in 1836, and was noted for his temperance activities.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Mary Murray, Ibid., n.p.

⁴⁰ John William Orr, Pictorial Guide to the Falls of Niagara -- A Manual for Visitors (Buffalo: Salisbury and Clapp, 1842), p. 105.

⁴¹ Parsons, op. cit., p. 47.

His extravagance deserves quotation in full.

The whole view of the Valley of the Niagara was at once enchanting and sublime. The earth looked clothed in fresher verdure than we had seen it in before; the recent rains having brightened all the grass and foliage of the surrounding country. . . . We lingered to enjoy this unequalled landscape; full of the most sublime and awful grandeur near, and as full of the softest and loveliest beauty in the distance, with every combination of hill and valley, forest and lawn, rocks and verdure, cataract, lake and river, that the most enchanting scenes of the picturesque could demand -- a landscape that leaves all others on this continent that we have yet beheld, far in the shade, and that cannot be surpassed, I think, in grandeur or in beauty, throughout the world. 42

Before arriving at Niagara, tourists encountered several delays -- the solicitations of guides⁴³ and self-imposed domestic duties. Tourists who chose to squirm free from the onslaught of guides, ready to "point out all the different views and impart full knowledge of all the localities,"⁴⁴ did so with relative ease, despite Basil Hall's complaint that his "body and soul [were] literally worn out by the ceaseless importunities" of the guides. "Americans are never satisfied that one has seen anything unless one has seen everything."⁴⁵

⁴²James Silk Buckingham, America, Historical, Statistical and Descriptive (London: Fisher, Sons and Company, 1841), vol. III, p. 455. These volumes were later published under the title: The Eastern and Western States of America.

⁴³See footnote 15 above for a brief discussion of guides at Niagara Falls.

⁴⁴DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 103.

⁴⁵Hall, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 209.

The second delay was much more complex than merely rejecting a guide. Given their roused expectations, we might easily marvel that tourists were willing to impose further delays on themselves. But the Falls were to "be done" properly. Tourists wanted to be well rested, well fed, and otherwise at home before allowing the Falls to impinge on their carefully nurtured expectations, for the experience of Niagara was thought to be less traumatic if persons were prepared physically as well as emotionally. J. W. Orr, whose Pictorial Guide to the Falls of Niagara was the most elaborate early nineteenth century guide devoted exclusively to the Falls, put the matter crudely.

We will suppose that the traveller. . . .
has selected his temporary home, secured
his room, attended to the safe deposit of
his luggage; and is now anxious and
impatient to visit the grand cataract,
and see the wonderful scenes, about which
so much has been said and written, but
which he is now, for the first time, about
to behold. Is it so reader? -- Well, we
are ready to conduct you. On leaving your
hotel, turn to the left. . . .⁴⁶

It needn't be so crude. Lavasseur was "full of impatience that may be readily conceived," but was delayed by the "duration of a public dinner" which, though "abridged as much as possible, [he was] obliged to partake on arriving."⁴⁷ "Little preparations,"⁴⁸ "necessary

⁴⁶Orr, op. cit., p. 111.

⁴⁷A. Lavasseur, Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825 Translated by John D. Godman, M.D. (Philadelphia: 1829), p. 185. Lavasseur was Lafayette's personal secretary.

⁴⁸Mary Murray, Diary of Trip to Saratoga and Niagara Falls

preliminaries,"⁴⁹ and frustrating social obligations further delayed the "pursuit of the object for which tourists had come to see all that could be seen, to make sketches, admire, wonder and adore."⁵⁰ Merely calling these rituals a "judicious routine of observation" to the benefit of and therefore a "desideratum to the travelling public,"⁵¹ does not explain them satisfactorily.

Basil Hall, one of the most astute and self-conscious of nineteenth century tourists neglected to explain why, after arriving at the Falls, he chose to go to bed before nightfall, rather than catch even a glimpse of the cataract. His only comment: "It is curious to see with how much deeper, or at all events more engrossing interest, we attend to our own private, domestic concerns, than to the grandest spectacle which the world presents."⁵² Nathaniel Hawthorne is more helpful. "Never did a pilgrim approach Niagara with a deeper enthusiasm," he reports of himself.⁵³ Yet at the same time, he was "loath to exchange

and Back to Saratoga (Unpublished manuscript in the New-York Historical Society), no pagination. This tour, as distinguished from the one mentioned in footnote 32, took place from August 7, 1825 to September 12, 1825.

⁴⁹Dixon, op. cit., p. 117.

⁵⁰Murray, op. cit., n.p.

⁵¹Orr, op. cit., p. iii.

⁵²Hall, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 187.

⁵³Nathaniel Hawthorne, Tales, Sketches and Other Papers, Vol. XII of Complete Works (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), p. 42. This is the "Standard Library Edition of Hawthorne's Work, Riverside Press.

the pleasures of hope for those of memory."⁵⁴ Hawthorne spoke for many of his fellow pilgrims; anticipation was sweeter than reality. Hawthorne's memoir is brilliant and deserves to be quoted at length.

I am quite ashamed of myself here. Not that I ran, like a madman for the fall, and plunged into the thickest of the spray, -- never stopping to breathe, till breathing was impossible: not that I committed this or any other suitable extravagance. On the contrary, I alighted with perfect decency and composure, and gave my cloak to the black waiter, pointed out my luggage, and inquired, not the nearest way to the cataract, but about the dinner hour. The interval was spent in arranging my dressMy mind had grown strongly numbed, and my spirits apathetic, with a slight depression, not decided enough to be termed madness. My enthusiasm was in a death-like slumber. . . .Such has often been my apathy when objects, long sought, and earnestly desired, were placed within 55 my reach.

Hawthorne's fear of exposing his "delight" to reality, therefore maximizing every delay he could find, was the response of many tourists. They grieved that "there was no more to imagine," but failed to anticipate that "there was much to feel."⁵⁶ Contrast Hawthorne's typical "apathy" with the minority reaction of Thomas Hamilton, who found it "impossible to rest. . . .before gazing on the natural wonder which [he] had travelled so far to behold."⁵⁷ At least Hawthorne did not go to the

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 42.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 42-3.

⁵⁶Moore, op. cit., p. 80.

extreme of some foreign visitors -- turning back at the sound of the Falls after having crossed the Atlantic to see them!

Finally, in the manner of Nathaniel Hawthorne, we arrive at the brink of the Falls and to an analysis of tourists' images of the water wonder. They found description an almost impossible task, for even Charles Dickens, the master of description, "was in a manner stunned and unable to comprehend the vastness of the scene."⁵⁸ Some were reluctant to commit their reactions to paper; others challenged anybody to capture adequately the meaning of Niagara in words, and then proceeded to attempt just that. Unravelling the enormous number of descriptions and impressions of Niagara is more an exercise in dredging tourist's minds, than it is a search for the "truth" about Niagara, though the latter is the ideal tourists set for themselves. And because of this, simplifying and categorizing the uniqueness of each individual reaction is an injustice, especially considering that for many tourists, "all elements of soul and sense [were] absorbed in the magnitude and glory of one single object."⁵⁹ Nevertheless, as

⁵⁷ Thomas Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1968), Vol. II, p. 316. This is a volume in the series "Reprints of Economic Classics." Hamilton's volume was first published in 1833.

⁵⁸ Charles Dickens, American Notes (Library Edition of Works, Vol. 17, pp. 181 ff. Boston: Fields, Osgood, and Company, 1867.), p. 385. Dickens toured the United States in 1842.

⁵⁹ Hamilton, op. cit., II, p. 316.

DeVeaux observes, "It is frequently inquired, what are the usual impressions of visitors? They are various."⁶⁰

II. "Behold:" Description and Anti-Description

The awful sublimities rushed full upon me.
But the former exquisite sensation was
gone. The string that had been touched
by the first impulse, and which fancy would
have forever kept in vibration, now rested
in reality. 61

Tourists had strong feelings about Niagara. Their wildest expectations were either borne out and even exceeded, or they found the Falls insipid and cursed those who had enticed them into making the long, difficult journey. Many tourists believed that being at Niagara Falls was a "peak experience" in which the "past and the future were obliterated."⁶² It was the present, the experience itself, which loomed large.

The day -- the hour -- the minute --
when his eye first rests on the Great
Horse-shoe Falls is an epoch in the life
of every man. . . .which time [can] not
diminish and only death efface. . . .
a single moment [would] extend through
a lifetime, enlarge the sphere of thought
and influence the whole tissue of his
moral being. 63

Abdy felt similarly, although his future was renewed, not "obliterated." "To witness this astounding sight, forms in the existence of every one a new era, to which his imagination will refer in its attempt to grasp the forms

⁶⁰DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 54.

⁶¹Moore, op. cit., p. 80.

⁶²Hamilton, op. cit., II, 317.

⁶³Ibid.

of grandeur and sublimity"⁶⁴ and which "cannot be forgotten by any distance of time or place."⁶⁵

A second group of typical responses is characterized by such terms and phrases as "reverence," "awe," "rapture," "high and enthralling amazement,"⁶⁶ "excitement raised to a pitch which seemed to dispel the idea of danger,"⁶⁷ and "intense admiration."⁶⁸ Persons in this group usually did not identify the sources of their feelings, although religious referents are certainly implied. Tourists with such emotions, DeVeaux reports,

were so much moved as to form a lasting attachment, and visited them often, even from a great distance. . . . They have been completely infatuated, and seem to live only in beholding the sublime works of nature, and in inhaling the pure though mist-impregnated atmosphere, which arises from the broken waters. ⁶⁹

At Niagara, pilgrims stood "mute and powerless in the presence of that scene of awful grandeur on which their

⁶⁴Edward Strutt Abdy, Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America from April 1833 to October 1834 (London: John Murray, 1835), Vol. I, p. 288. Abdy was a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, England.

⁶⁵Rubio, Rambles in the United States and Canada during the year 1845 (London: John Ollivier, 1846), pp. 88-9.

⁶⁶John Fowler, Journal of a Tour in the State of New York in the Year 1830; with Remarks on Agriculture in those Parts Most Eligible for Settlers (London: Whittaker, Treacher and Arnot, 1831), p. 139.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Buckingham, Ibid., III, p. 457.

⁶⁹DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 154.

gaze was riveted."⁷⁰ J. S. Buckingham "felt sensations of the deepest awe, mingled with an exquisite glow of the most intense pleasure, and a charm, amounting to infatuation, which fixed [him] immovably to the spot."⁷¹ More prosaically, and with a religious referent, DeVeaux concludes that "such sensations are becoming the place; for who can look upon this rush of many waters. . . . and this abyss of foam without revering Him who made them and upholds them still."⁷²

Time was a central factor in the initial impressions of tourists. In the first category, the present "obliterates" the past; in the second, time stands still. A third feeling also involves time. Charles Dickens experienced an

instant and lasting. . . .peace of Mind, tranquility, calm recollections of the Dead, great thoughts of Eternal Rest and Happiness. Niagara was at once stamped on my heart, an Image of Beauty, to remain there, changeless and indelible, until its pulses cease to beat, forever. ⁷³

Dickens pictures his future as a plateau -- at one edge was Niagara; at the other, death. He avowed his readiness and death, as if life is completed by a visit to the Falls. He anticipated no new comparable experience on earth. Niagara prepared tourists to meet their Maker, for "it

⁷⁰Hamilton, op. cit., II, pp. 316-7.

⁷¹Buckingham, op. cit., III, p. 456.

⁷²DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 155.

⁷³Dickens, op. cit., p. 385.

would have been hard for man to stand nearer God than he does here."⁷⁴ Margaret Fuller labelled her similar preparation for death as "quiet satisfaction."⁷⁵

Some tourists avoided the issues of time and death in favor of directly confronting Niagara's physical reality. But they were quickly frustrated, and instead wrote poems of praise for Niagara's creator. Using physical images at first, they concluded with traditionally religious language. Representative samples again outline this response. Images of power and strength prevail: "impetuous torrents," the "deep, vast abyss,"⁷⁶ a falls "grander and more powerful" than any other, a stupendousoverpowering. . . .and indescribable force,"⁷⁷ a "foaming torrent urging its way on like the angry billows of the ocean," and "great cauldrons, the whole river boiling up in white and milky appearance."⁷⁸ But such images of power and strength inevitably gave rise to questions.

Who can look at such a scene and not
remember its Creator? What must be the

⁷⁴John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (London: 1872-74) Vol. I, p. 286. Forster's work consists principally of letters written to Forster by Dickens.

⁷⁵Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Collected Works, ed. by Arthur B. Fuller (Boston: 1855-60), Vol. II, p. 4. This volume is entitled Summer on the Lakes.

⁷⁶Buckingham, op. cit., III, p. 454

⁷⁷Joseph John Gurney, A Journey in North America Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie (Norwich: Printed for Private Circulation by Joseph Fletcher, 1841), p. 317.

⁷⁸John A. Clark, Gleanings by the Way (Philadelphia: W. J. and J. K. Simon, 1842), p. 153. Rev. Clark was Rector of St. Andrew's Church, Philadelphia. He made his trip in 1837.

glories which God will reveal to his ransomed and sanctified people in the celestial world when he allows to linger here amid the defilements and desolations of sin, such traces of surpassing beauty and love-
liness? 79

A fifth type of initial response is identified by one of two combinations of contrasting feelings: (1) wonder and fear or (2) delight and melancholy. Fear, a common experience at Niagara (it was, after all, a dangerous place⁸⁰), was rarely separated from its more predictable partner, wonder. On approaching the Falls, Caroline Gilman

experienced a sensation of oppression, followed by trembling and fears. . . . For a few moments, I longed for the sober cliffs of Trenton. . . .but as I gazed, my thoughts became dream-like; the far-distant and dim future blended together; I felt an indistinct and troubled joy, like the bright chaos beneath me. 81

William Darby, a well known and experienced traveller, expressed "fearful solicitude"⁸² while viewing the beauties, the horrors, and the wonders of the grand cataract."⁸³ John Fowler was self-conscious about combining these two emotions.

I confess the impression was awful, but to me, if I may say so, it was awfully

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰See a more detailed discussion of fear below.

⁸¹Gilman, op. cit., p. 108.

⁸²Darby, op. cit., p. 160.

⁸³Ibid., p. 161.

enchancing; my excitement was raised to a pitch which seemed to dispel the idea of danger, and I verily believe if, at that moment, I had known it to be imminent, I should have retreated from the position with some hesitation and reluctance. I was dumb with high and enthralling amazement. 84

The other combination of contrasting feelings -- melancholy and delight -- is best explained by this example.

My first sensation was that of exquisite delight at having before me the greatest wonder, in my opinion, in the world. Strange as this may appear, this feeling was immediately succeeded by an irresistible melancholy. . . .far from diminishing, the more I gazed, the stronger and deeper the feeling became. Yet this scene of sadness was strongly mingled with a kind of intoxicating fascination. Whether the phenomenon is peculiar to Niagara, I know not, but certainly it has been generally observed, that the spirits are affected and depressed in a singular manner by the magic influence of this stupendous Falls. 85

Of course, each of these five major responses was rarely expressed apart from the others. They are simply the most important elements of the pilgrim's initial reactions to Niagara, or DeVeaux's "usual impressions."⁸⁶ The richest impressions or images are those that weave these feelings together in subtle ways, preserving the identity of each, but using each to inform the total image. John Fowler was particularly skilled at this.

⁸⁴Fowler, op. cit., p. 139.

⁸⁵deRoos, op. cit., p. 175.

⁸⁶DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 54.

My feelings asked for words, and in the same instant mocked the power of language. I felt the weakness -- the littleness -- the nothingness of man, and the immensity of that Being whose Almighty fiat had called into existence the magnificent scenes which surrounded me, and poured along the cataract which foamed and thundered at my feet. I was as if commingled with the very elements -- living in the tumult: the world seemed annihilated and dead: every faculty and power of the soul was taken captive -- riveted to this spot. The creations of fancy had fled away; imagination was beggared by reality; and I felt at once that Niagara, -- the mighty Niagara! -- was all, and more than all, it had ever been represented to be -- what no pencil could paint, or pen portray -- great beyond every conception of grandeur -- sublime beyond every idea of sublimity. 87

Another significant type of response was physical. Thomas Hamilton reported that he felt "as if stricken with catalepsy. . . . his blood ceased to flow or rather was sent back in overpowering pressure on the heart." He "gasped like a drowning man to catch a mouthful of breath."⁸⁸ Since the experience of Niagara was both visual and audible, one might expect that tourists would mention its effect on both their ears and their eyes. Such was not the case. It was loud, yes, but tourists did not go into detail. But the effect on their eyes. . . .

Tourists wept! Even males wept! William Darby appealed for forgiveness for "dropping tears that were rapidly swallowed in the vortex of Niagara."⁸⁹ On

⁸⁷Fowler, op. cit., p. 140.

⁸⁸Hamilton, op. cit.

⁸⁹Darby, op. cit., pp. 160-1.

approaching the Falls, Thomas Moore "felt as if approaching the very residence of Deity; the tears started to [his] eyes; and [he] remained. . . .in that delicious absorption which pious enthusiasm alone can produce."⁹⁰ Mrs. Trollope found herself incapacitated.

I can only say that wonder, terror, and delight completely overwhelmed me. I wept with a strange mixture of pleasure and pain, and certainly was, for some time, too violently affected in the physique to be capable of much pleasure; but when this emotion subsided, and I had recovered some degree of composure, my enjoyment was very great indeed. ⁹¹

Isaac Fidler, in contrast to other male tourists, proudly fended off tears, but denied that his example of manliness indicated any reservations about the Falls.

They are utterly beyond any description which can be conveyed by words. I did not, however, weep on first beholding them, as some have done; but regarded ⁹² them steadily, and with tearless optics.

Another variation on the "optical" theme was recorded by an anonymous tourist, who, after having attended to the domestic duties of arrival,

sallied out to see that which is truly said to be worth a voyage across the Atlantic to behold. . . .this was the first time in my life I thought my eyes too small. However, I stretched them

⁹⁰ Moore, op. cit., p. 80.

⁹¹ Mrs. Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (London: Whittaker, Treacher and Company, 1832), Vol. II, p. 226.

⁹² Isaac Fidler, Observations on Professions, Literature, Manners and Emigration in the United States and Canada (New York: Harper, 1833), p. 126.

as wide as they would well bear, and they⁹³ partially answered my purpose.

Both feeling responses and physical responses were common. But tourists were not entirely happy with their descriptions of either their emotions or the physical reality. Their "literary prowess" was inadequate to the task of describing a Falls which had already been inadequately described too many times since Father Hennepin "discovered" Niagara in 1797. Lavasseur gladly "relinquished the trial;" Wilkie struggled until he "dropped [his] humble goosequill in hopeless despair."⁹⁴ Coke's "poor pencil" failed him.⁹⁵ Some tourists felt a sense of personal guilt, but a greater number accepted the impossibility of describing Niagara and appeared liberated from the assumed necessity of "saying something." "Why do I attempt to describe what is indescribable?" asked Mary Murray.⁹⁶ "As hopeless for the pen as for the

⁹³ _____, Notes of a Tour Through the Western Part of the State of New York in 1829 (Two hundred copies reprinted in October, 1916 from the Ariel, Philadelphia, 1829-30, for George P. Humphrey, Rochester, New York, p. 36.

⁹⁴ Although not common, George Carr's response is too precious to ignore. At the first sight of Niagara, Carr "certainly never laughed so much at anything before." The reason? He was "neither surprised nor disappointed" for the scene was "exactly what [he] had expected and seen in drawings 50 times." Then he stopped laughing. "As we grew nearer, my feelings changed most prodigiously, for when you get quite close to them, they do exceed anything one can imagine, and it is quite impossible to give any idea of their wonderful grandeur and magnificance." (George K. Carr, Short Tour Through the United States and Canada, edited with notes by Deoch Fulton (New York: New York Public Library, 1937), p. 20.

⁹⁵ Coke, op. cit., II, p. 42.

⁹⁶ Mary Murray (1805), op. cit., n.p.

pencil,"⁹⁷ "utter impossibility,"⁹⁸ "cannot be expressed,"⁹⁹ "vain to attempt,"¹⁰⁰ "none have and none can,"¹⁰¹ "it is not possible"¹⁰² -- such were the resigned conclusions of the faithful. Despairing of trying to say something new and fresh, an otherwise unusually loquacious German

abstain[ed] from any attempt to represent it; inadequate drawings, and thousands of descriptions, are to be found in all parts of the world; I will not add to the number. It was so surprisingly grand I could only gaze in admiration, and worship God. 103

Duncan also resisted the temptation to contribute to a collection of redundancies. "The Falls of Niagara have been so frequently described, and the whole vocabulary of

⁹⁷ Henry D. Gilpin, A Northern Tour; Being a Guide to Saratoga, Lake George, Niagara, Canada. . . .embracing an account of the canals, colleges, public institutions, natural curiosities, etc. (Philadelphia: H. D. Carey and I. Lea, 1825), p. 147.

⁹⁸ John Disturnell, The Traveller's Guide to the Hudson River, Saratoga Springs, Lake George, Falls of Niagara, and Thousand Islands; Montreal, Quebec, and the Saguenay River; also, to the Green and White Mountains and other parts of New England; forming the Fashionable Tour Through the United States and Canada, with Maps and Embellishments. (New York: The American News Company, 1864), p. 121. This is one in a long series of Guides published by Disturnell and the American News Company, and under various titles.

⁹⁹ Lavasseur, op. cit., p. 185.

¹⁰⁰ Parsons, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁰¹ Orr, op. cit., p. 93.

¹⁰² Hamilton, op. cit., II, p. 316.

¹⁰³ Frederick Wilhelm Christian Gerstaecker, Wild Sports of the Wild West (1837-1843) (Boston: Brosby and Nichols, 1864), p. 48. This gentleman travelled along the Erie Canal and visited Niagara Falls in 1837.

sublimity so completely exhausted, that it seems. . . .
 better to pass them by in silence, and refer you for an
 account of them to the narratives of former travellers."¹⁰⁴
 William Darby observed that, despite shortfalls in "doing
 adequate justice to the reality," to describe Niagara

has been so frequently made. . . .that a
 description of the Falls of Niagara has
 become familiar to almost every general
 reader. For this reason. . . .I shall
 certainly feel but little confident of
 either reaching the merit of the subject,
 or contributing to the stock of knowledge
 already obtained thereon. I shall excuse
 myself from repeating what has already been¹⁰⁵
 repeated before.

Tourists gave six principal reasons for their
 frustrations in trying to describe Niagara. These bear
 close study for they are windows to understanding the
 diverse responses to Niagara.

1. Heightened expectations contributed to the
 feelings of indescribability. Tourists had complained
 that the Niagara of their imaginations had already burst
 the bounds of literary description, yet matters were com-
 plicated because "Niagara far exceeded their exalted
 expectations."¹⁰⁶ Thomas Cather's "anticipations were

¹⁰⁴ John Duncan, Travels Through Part of the United States
 and Canada in 1818 and 1819 (Glasgow: Printed at the
 University Press for Hurst, Robinson, and Company, London,
 1823), Vol. II, p. 31.

¹⁰⁵ Darby, op. cit. p. 102.

¹⁰⁶ David M. Prall, Journal of a Jaunt from New York to
 Niagara, July 1821, kept by David M. Prall of New York
 City, son of Abraham and Marion Prall (Unpublished manu-
 script, New-York Historical Society), no pagination.

more than realized."¹⁰⁷ Niagara "far exceeded, in magnificence and sublimity, every picture which my imagination had ever formed of this matchless prodigy."¹⁰⁸ Mary Murray's "expectations were great, but they seemed as nothing compared with the awful, the sublime reality."¹⁰⁹

Blane had "for some time worked up [his] imagination to the highest pitch, and had endeavored to condense . . . everything [he] had read. . . but on arriving [he] found that all the ideas and all the descriptions. . . were nothing to the reality."¹¹⁰ Furthermore, a "painting or an indifferent drawing gives a better idea of natural scenery than all the words can describe," though they are "deficient in two key elements of a waterfall, motion and noise."¹¹¹ Francis Lieber added "color and form" to "sound and movement" as elements which could not be conveyed except through direct experience. All four elements must "burst upon you like Niagara itself."¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Cather, Voyage to America: The Journals of Thomas Cather, Edited with an introduction by Thomas Yoseloff, Illustrated with contemporary drawings by Harry Tyler (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), p. 147. Cather travelled in the United States for eleven months in 1836.

¹⁰⁸ Abdy, op. cit., I, p. 288.

¹⁰⁹ Mary Murray (1805), op. cit., n.p.

¹¹⁰ William N. Blane, An Excursion Through the United States and Canada during the years 1822 and 1823. (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1824), pp. 397-8.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Francis Lieber, Letters to a Gentleman in Germany, Written after a Trip from Philadelphia to Niagara (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1834), p. 354.

The opportunity afforded the cultured and well-travelled to "consult the impressions derived from personal observation" was of no avail at Niagara. As the "most sublime scene ever witnessed," the "scene was altogether new" in comparison with "other large rivers . . . and descriptions of Niagara Falls."¹¹³ Nothing could stand the test of comparison with Niagara, as Fowler said,

again and again. . . .Let no one expect to find something pleasing, wildly beautiful, or romantic, all is wonderfully grand, awful and sublime. Every power of the soul is arrested: the impression strikes deeper and deeper the longer you contemplate, and you feel more strongly the impossibility of doing justice to your perceptions and feelings. 114

2. For lack of perspective, tourists were reluctant to attempt description in the immediate presence of the Falls. Both Lieber and Beaufoy complained that a "giddiness" inhibited their activities.¹¹⁵ Beaufoy worried that the limits of propriety would be broken if he "gave way to feelings" excited by the view. His readers would "laugh at [him] as an enthusiast."¹¹⁶ Similar feelings so "strained [and] alarmed" compatriot Basil Hall's "heated fancy" that, in spite of attempts to

¹¹³Fowler, op. cit., p. 138.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 147.

¹¹⁵Lieber, op. cit., p. 343; Beaufoy, Tour Through Parts of the United States and Canada (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1823), p. 96.

¹¹⁶Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 96.

control what his mind told him was nonsense, only "drawing back [for] . . . reflection and resolution" were satisfactory restraints. Hall concluded that "the mere proximity of some things" blocks the creative process and lessens one's ability to reflect clearly and productively. Satisfactory description had to balance enthusiasm and propriety. Distance was necessary to gain the needed perspective.

3. Even more important for Hall was the lack of temporal perspective. His imagination was "overcrowded" at Niagara; his full "attention [was] needed to arrange the images," to coordinate images with previous ones, "not for the purpose of drawing offensive comparisons, but with a view to the purification of our own thoughts and the expulsion of errors, and narrowing prejudices." The greater the natural wonder, the greater the time needed to assimilate and understand the images. "Repeated and leisurely observation" was necessary to "allow each circumstance to take its proper place in our minds, side by side, or to amalgamate with the results of our previous experience."¹¹⁷ The lack of perspective gained by time and distance was an insurmountable obstacle to adequate description and reflection on the great water wonder.

4. The initial frustrations of tourists were also understood as a failure of language, or from a different perspective, a result of overdescription. Tourists opted

¹¹⁷Hall, op. cit., I, pp. 182-3.

for one or the other largely as a matter of national pride. Americans traced the problem of "indescribability" to the British exaggeration of British wonders, for on arriving at Niagara, travellers from the Old World found, to their amazement (and the glee of Americans), that their vocabulary of extravagance had been exhausted on lesser wonders back home. If the "English and Scotch poets are any criterion for descriptive expressions, (and they are the true standard, all will allow)," nothing but the most expressive and high language was appropriate to Niagara. But British poets and other travellers had squandered their literary fireworks on the "tame and feeble" waterfalls of Europe. The British had created a language problem by their "laboured delineation" of British wonders -- "descriptions so lofty as to leave nothing to add, even when applied to the Falls of Niagara."¹¹⁸ All this, of course, served as a prelude to the familiar American conclusion that Niagara "is, without doubt, one of the most wonderful of all the works in nature, and affords scenes. . . more sublime and terrible than is exhibited in any other land."¹¹⁹

American travellers blamed their British colleagues for the observation that "no language [could] convey any idea of the grandeur of the scene,"¹²⁰ dismissed

¹¹⁸ DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 131.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Cather, op. cit., p. 147.

overwrought British descriptions of their own landscape as too "high and extravagant" and then proceeded to use the very same language to describe Niagara Falls. That possibility was not open to British travellers, wishing to preserve their own wonders against the insults of others, but unable to conceive an adequate vocabulary for describing Niagara. Captain Frederick Marryat of the Royal Navy suggested that it was "almost useless to attempt to describe when you feel that language fails."¹²¹ Thomas Moore was unusually self-critical.

It is impossible to convey even a faint idea of their magnificence. . . .The most burning words of poetry have all been lavished upon inferior and ordinary subjects. We must have new combinations of language to describe Niagara Falls. 122

And James Stuart: "Such words as grandeur, sublimity, majesty fail altogether to express the feelings which so magnificent a sight, exceeding so immeasurably all the same that we have ever seen or imagined, excites."¹²³

Americans were highly amused with British travellers struggling to solve a problem that they had created.

"Pretty droll" shot one frontiersman at deRoos, who in turn "could not help envying him his vocabulary, which

¹²¹ Frederick Marryat, Diary in America, Edited with notes and an introduction by Sydney Jackman (New York: Knopf First Porzoi Edition, 1962), p. 110. Marryat travelled in America during 1837-8.

¹²² Moore, op. cit., p. 80.

¹²³ James Stuart, Three Years in North America (Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1833), Vol. I, p. 142. Stuart travelled in the United States in 1828.

had so eloquently released" deRoos from his dilemma.¹²⁴

Although travellers could not agree on the cause of an inadequate language, they did agree that one favorite technique, comparison with other natural wonders, was demeaning to Niagara. "Nature has so many waterfalls, a few cataracts -- ONE NIAGARA! -- that stands alone, vast, grand, indescribable! -- the mighty alembic in which the world of waters is refined and etherealized!"¹²⁵ Tourists were deprived of a well-used technique and discovered no substitute.

As it stands alone in the history of nature, with nothing to equal or resemble it, so, while we rest upon its verge, will the breast glow with sensations before unknown, and swell with emotions before unfelt. . . . in the contemplation of nature's mighty works. . . . we forget the world that is around us. ¹²⁶

McKenney expressed his sentiments clearly

How can any conception be given of that for which there is no parallel, and with which there is nothing to compare it? To what would you liken the sun? But the sun does not surpass all the powers of language to describe it as a world of light, more than does the Niagara cataract all that relates to the ocean, or the fountains which dash down the mountain precipices to mingle their waters with it. ¹²⁷

5. Niagara was indescribable according to several

¹²⁴ deRoos, op. cit., p. 164.

¹²⁵ Orr, op. cit., p. 17.

¹²⁶ Gilpin, op. cit., p. 148.

¹²⁷ Thomas Lorraine McKenney, Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes (Baltimore; F. Lucas, Jr., 1827), pp. 93-4.

tourists because the emotions experienced at the Falls were themselves indescribable. The "sensations of admiration and delight" and other feelings could not be captured by human language.¹²⁸ Therefore, language could not do justice to the Falls. Niagara "diffuses through the mind a feeling of ungovernable awe. . . .a scene like this is not to be described -- it is only to be felt."¹²⁹ At best, "genuine feelings" were communicable only to persons of "kindred sympathy. . . .[to] the circle of friends to whom [one's] habits of thinking are well known."¹³⁰

Furthermore, these emotions were preliminary and incomplete -- "obscurity" limited clear and precise descriptions. Feeling that no language could convey her ill-formed feelings, Francis Trollope "trembled like a fool" even though her children were

beaming with delight. . . .Something beyond vastness. . . .a shadowy mystery [hung] over [Niagara] which neither the eye nor even the imagination [could] penetrate; but I dare not dwell on this, it is a dangerous subject, and any attempt to describe the sensations produced must lead directly to nonsense. 131

Charles Murray's obscure thoughts were further clouded by "overcrowding. They were too mingled and confused to be defined, or interesting to anyone." The "faculties of

¹²⁸Blane, op. cit., p. 176.

¹²⁹Gilpin, op. cit., pp. 147-8.

¹³⁰Hall, op. cit., I, p. 185.

¹³¹Trollope, op. cit., vol. II, p. 226.

reason were absorbed, and the powers of imagination and memory held for a time divided empire." Murray could only combine "well-known forms and beloved images" in a symphony of praise for Niagara.

How can language convey impressions too tremendous and sublime even for the mind to bear? How can it presume to embody a scene, on which the eye could not gaze, to which the ear could not listen, and which the oppressed and overwhelmed power of reflection could not contemplate without feelings of awe, wonder and delight, so intense as to amount almost to pain? 132

Horatio Parsons generalizes these feelings in a typical guidebook statement of rationalized enthusiasm.

The sublimity arising from obscurity is here experienced in its greatest force. The eye, unable to discover the mysterious phenomenon . . . or even to penetrate the mist that seems to hang as a veil over the amazing and terrific scene, gives place to the imagination, and the mind is instinctively elevated and filled with majestic dread. 133

6. Perhaps the most significant cause of "indescribability" was a lacuna between the physical description of Niagara and the "idea of Niagara." Because the "immense Body of Water which rushes in tremendous torrents. . . sets all language at defiance and fills the rapt beholder with amazement,"¹³⁴ even less could an adequate idea of the Falls be formed from a description. . . Its pitch in feet, its

¹³² Charles A. Murray, Travels in North America, 1834-36 (New York: Harper, 1839), pp. 66-69.

¹³³ Parsons, op. cit., p. 28.

¹³⁴ Mary Murray (1805), op. cit., n.p.

width, velocity, and consequent mass [could] be estimated with considerable accuracy,¹³⁵

but "pity the man who would coldly set down a description of those ineffable wonders. . . .and submit them to the admeasurement of gallons and yards."¹³⁶ Nothing but a visit could satisfactorily provide the all-important "idea."¹³⁷ "All thy loftiest conceptions -- the most vivid colorings thou wilt -- I still tell thee, Thou Hast No Idea of Niagara."¹³⁸

These six reasons for Niagara's "indescribability," like the five types of initial responses, were rarely separate and discrete in the minds of tourists. But no

¹³⁵ Darby, op. cit., p. 164.

¹³⁶ Moore, op. cit., p. 80.

¹³⁷ Parsons admonished the faithful to "hear and to see for themselves" (Parsons, op. cit., p. 20); "with one's own eyes the immense mass of water. . . .to feel the earth tremble under one's feet, to listen to the noise rumbling thunder a thousand times repeated." (Arfwedson, op. cit., II, p. 316). McKenney thought that to "comprehend the Falls of Niagara, you must see and hear them -- you must therefore behold them for yourself." (McKenney, op. cit., p. 93) E. T. Coke agreed (Coke, op. cit., II, p. 30) as did Basil Hall, who said it with considerably more class. "In such a harvest of curiosity, the pilgrim has for his pains the advantage of reaping a whole crop; while those who receive his information at second hand on his return, must be content with such gleanings as may drop from his stories as samples of the fertility of the distant land." (Hall, op. cit., I, p. 186).

¹³⁸ Fowler, op. cit., p. 147. It is not possible to overemphasize the importance of this cause of indescribability to Niagara's pilgrims. The diaries and travelogues are littered with statements using almost the same language as Darby and Fowler. For elegant ones, see especially E. T. Coke, op. cit., II, p. 30; Disturnell, op. cit., p. 121; Abdy, op. cit., I, p. 288; Arfwedson, op. cit., II, pp. 316-20; Orr, op. cit., pp. iv-v.

matter. Their chief value is not in what they describe or fail to describe; nor is it in their conceptual clarity. They are windows into the sensibilities of the pilgrims who visited natural wonders. This is particularly the case at Niagara Falls, for although tourists consciously tried to "sketch a correct picture of the moral [rather] than the physical characteristics of America,"¹³⁹ major natural wonders embodied "moral characteristics" for many tourists.

It may seem surprising, after all these disclaimers, that some tourists were actually disappointed with Niagara Falls. Max Berger's conclusion that the "Falls were one of the few things in America that never disappointed the visiting Britain;"¹⁴⁰ Orr's commercially inspired statement that "no pestilential or epidemic complaints ever infest this spot;"¹⁴¹ and Margaret Fuller's extravagant claim that Niagara was the "one object in the world that would not disappoint" are contrary to the evidence. Although many tourists changed their negative opinions, it is inaccurate to suggest that Niagara met with universal acclaim. Most British tourists did become "rapt, motionless, speechless, and entranced with wonder," as Berger points out, but by no means all of them.¹⁴²

¹³⁹Duncan, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 31-2.

¹⁴⁰Max Berger, The British Travellers in America, 1836-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 39.

¹⁴¹Orr, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁴²Berger, op. cit., p. 39.

The tendency of some travellers to "catch a first glimpse immediately on arriving at Niagara"¹⁴³ sometimes led to disappointment. Guidebooks therefore encouraged attending to "domestic duties" to assure readiness and that the first view would be the best view.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, tourists were advised to check first impressions with another angle of vision, else they leave Niagara without giving the Falls a fair chance.¹⁴⁵ Blane had "heard it said that many on first seeing the Falls were disappointed," and passed it off as the "vain discontentedness" of "persons who are determined never to be pleased."¹⁴⁶ Amelia Murray boasted that she "had not a feeling of disappointment" as if to shame those lurking tourists who had implied that she might be disappointed. Challenging the detractors of Niagara, she claimed "it is certainly worth crossing the Atlantic for Niagara alone."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³Steele's Book of Niagara Falls (Buffalo: Oliver G. Steele, 1846), p. 10. This guidebook is a reprint under a different title of Horatio Parson's A Guide to Travellers Visiting the Falls of Niagara. (See footnote 6 above.)

¹⁴⁴See pages 388-390.

¹⁴⁵Steele's Book of Niagara Falls, op. cit., inserted a warning, not included in Parson's Guide that tourists should be wary of first impressions, especially negative ones. Disappointment at Niagara Falls was not unknown.

¹⁴⁶Blane, op. cit., p. 397.

¹⁴⁷Amelia Murray, Letters from the United States, Cuba, and Canada (New York: G. P. Putnam and Company, 1856), pp. 109-111. Amelia Murray was the maid servant to Queen Victoria.

But why were some tourists disappointed? Their reasoning provides further insight into the images of Niagara. Some complained that the Falls were not high enough, broad enough, or deep enough; that "Horseshoe Falls" and Goat Island compromised the Falls' breadth. God had made a mistake in His handiwork.¹⁴⁸ Duncan complained,

We are accustomed to expect that the peculiar beauties of the 'mountain and the flood' should never be disconnected in the landscape and we are not prepared to find the Falls of Niagara in the midst of a tract of country where for miles around not a solitary hillock varies the surface and nothing meets the eye but interminable forests of pine. 149

James Stuart suggested that the "want of mountains, rock and the grand romantic scenery which accompany any considerable falls of water, and which travellers are thus so much accustomed to associate with them" gave some disappointed tourists the feeling that they had only received "half their expected enjoyment."¹⁵⁰ Interestingly, this is just the opposite from Basil Hall's conclusion on Niagara's environment.¹⁵¹

A second and most important reason for disappointment was the inflated expectations tourists brought to the

¹⁴⁸ Benjamin Dorr, A Journal of Tours (An unpublished manuscript in the Cornell University Archives and Manuscripts Department of the Olin Graduate Library, #23), pp. 11-12; Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 97.

¹⁴⁹ Duncan, op. cit., II, p. 50.

¹⁵⁰ Stuart, op. cit., p. 144.

¹⁵¹ See pages 384-385.

Falls. Tourists had formed their expectations from months and years of reading travel accounts, viewing sketches and hearing the tales of others. Usually their expectations were shattered by a reality which far exceeded their remotest image, but not always. Some pilgrims found their expectations exceeded the reality. John Duncan suggested that disappointment was

a very common feeling when strangers first visit these cataracts. They have gathered their idea of them from books of Geography and Travels, in which all the parts of speech and degree of comparison are fatigued by a seemingly fruitless effort to sketch the stupendous scene. 152

Out of five in Duncan's party, "four returned to the tavern perfectly out of humor with the Falls, and all who had written or spoken in their praise." 153

Allardice, another Briton was also out of humor with the Falls. This gentleman believed, though the evidence was wanting, that disappointment "usually attended the actual sight of any remarkable unbounded expectations." Even at Niagara, "exaggerated ideas may be perceived." In a mood of nationalist pique, Allardice

was unable to elevate [his] notions of it greatly above the recollections I had in some parts of the Highlands of Scotland. In a word, I left the renowned Falls of Niagara with an image of them much less significant than what had been impressed upon me before I saw them. 154

¹⁵²Duncan, op. cit., II, p. 38.

¹⁵³Ibid.

¹⁵⁴Captain Robert Barclay Allardice, Agricultural Tour in the

Charles Dauberry also "imagined that the fury of waters. . . would have been more terrific." For him, disappointment was almost predictable. "Each person before he reaches the spot, conjures up in his mind some sort of idea, which in certain respects must differ from the reality."¹⁵⁵ Another tourist proudly claimed that he had "formed a tolerably correct idea" of Niagara, "yet the reality was rather below than above: his expectations. He therefore warned his colleagues to take "the accounts of tourists" with "liberal deductions." Apparently, he had been disappointed several times.

Nathaniel Hawthorne expressed his initial disappointment by observing that "the past and the future were [not] obliterated."¹⁵⁶ He wished it were otherwise, longing for a release from the picture in his imagination.

Would that I had never heard of Niagara until I beheld it. Blessed were the wanderers of old, who heard its deep roar sounding through the woods as a summons to its unknown wonder, and approached its awful brink in all the freshness of native feeling; had its own mysterious voice been the first to warn me of its existence, then indeed, I might have fallen down and worshipped; but I had come haunted with a vision of foam and fury and dizzy cliffs, and an ocean tumbling down out of the

United States and Upper Canada with Miscellaneous Notices
(Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1842), p. 60.

¹⁵⁵ Charles G. B. Dauberry, Journal of a Tour Through the United States and Canada, made During the Years 1847-1838 (Oxford: Printed by T. Combe, 1843), p. 45. Dauberry was a Professor of Chemistry and Botany at Oxford University.

¹⁵⁶ See page 392.

sky -- a scene, in short, which nature had too much good taste and calm simplicity to realize. 157

That the "false conceptions of reality" could not be reconciled in his mind with the scene in front of him was disappointing. But he revised his opinion after rejecting the image of his memory and adjusting his hopes to the physical reality. Just the opposite from Hawthorne, Anna Jameson wished that she had chosen to wallow in the creations of her imagination, rather than being forced to compare her preconceptions with the reality. After seeing what were her "childhood's thought" and "youth's desire" since her "imagination was awakened to wonder and to wish," she whispered in her diary,

O tell it not among the Philistines! -- I wish I had not! I wish they were still a thing to behold -- a thing to be imagined, hoped and anticipated -- something to live for -- the reality has displaced from my mind an illusion far more magnificent than itself -- I have no words for my disappointment. . . .My soul sank within me. 158

Disappointment was hardly *de rigeur*; social pressure encouraged expressions of praise and astonishment. Fortunately for those promoting Niagara, tourists who expressed initial disappointment often changed their opinions. This is one reason why tourists were encouraged

¹⁵⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, Tales, Sketches and Other Papers, Vol. XII of Complete Works (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), p. 45. This is the "Standard Library Edition" of Hawthorne's Works, Riverside Press. Reprinted in Thomas R. Slicer, The Niagara Book: Complete Souvenir pp. 126-7.

¹⁵⁸ Slicer, op. cit., p. 116.

to spend several days at Niagara "to become. . . more accustomed. . . to the magnificence of the scene; and the more capable of appreciating the beauties of the various points, and the sublimity of the whole."¹⁵⁹ "If the first view generally disappoints, the second generally gratifies, there being nothing to abate the interest."¹⁶⁰

Hawthorne summarizes a typical change of heart. He

gradually and after much contemplation, came to know that Niagara is indeed a wonder of the world, and not the less wonderful because time and thought must be employed in comprehending it. Casting aside all preconceived notions, and preparations to the dire-struck or delighted, the beholder must stand beside it in the simplicity of his heart, suffering the mighty scene to work its own impression. Night after night, I dreamed of it, and was gladdened every morning by a growing capacity to enjoy it. ¹⁶¹

Time increased the delight of those whose first impression of Niagara was positive. J. S. Buckingham, of limitless enthusiasm, felt "bound like a spell" the longer he sat in one spot; he was afraid that a "few hours of silent and uninterrupted feeling. . . would occasion such a high degree of nervous excitement" that he would plunge into the froth below as if it were a stack of

¹⁵⁹

Dorr, op. cit., p. 97.

¹⁶⁰

Isaac Candler, A Summary View of America: Comprising a Description of the Face of the Country, and Several of the Principal Cities, and Remarks on the Moral, Social and Political Character of the People: Being the Result of Observation and Enquiries During a Journey in the United States. (London: Printed for T. Caldwell, 1824), p. 10.

¹⁶¹

Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. XII, p. 46. Reprinted in Braider, op. cit., pp. 204-5.

feathers, to be floated serenely downstream.¹⁶² Others, somewhat less overwhelmed, visited each part of the Falls "conscientiously and in detail" and concluded that "the more one looks at the astounding spectacle, the more astonished he becomes, the more it appeals to him, the more beauty he finds in it."¹⁶³ Guidebooks predicted that tourists, after an initial impression "filled with amazement" during which the mind loses "for a moment its equilibrium," would discover, "only after the scene had become somewhat familiar to the eye, to the ear, and the imagination, that its real grandeur and sublimity is properly realized and felt."¹⁶⁴ Typically, Basil Hall uses this sentiment to promote his understanding of Niagara as a thinking man's wonder.

Sometimes, though not often, excess of performance over promise has [made an immediate impression], even when the anticipations have been very high. But in most cases, it has required time and careful study to understand, as well as to feel, how much farther the actual presence of the wonders of nature can carry our thoughts than any previous unassisted conceptions¹⁶⁵ can raise them.

In spite of "indescribability" and disappointment,

¹⁶²Buckingham, op. cit., III, p. 468.

¹⁶³Count Francesco Arese, A Trip to the Prairies and the Interior of North America (1837-38), Translated from the French by Andrew Evans (New York: The Harbor Press, 1934), pp. 182-3; See also Cather, op. cit., p. 147. I know of no other printing of Arese's diary.

¹⁶⁴Parsons, op. cit., pp. 28-9.

¹⁶⁵Hall, op. cit., I, p. 182.

Niagaraiana flooded the popular market. Tourists ignored even their own protestations of inadequacy. Apologies and regrets were buried by social pressures. To the folks back home, Christian Schultz wrote, "I would gladly avail myself of an excuse for passing over the subject in silence, but. . . .I find myself under the necessity of sending you something."¹⁶⁶ McKenney was more to the point: "You, no doubt, expect something."

The necessity to "say something" must not mask a more profound quest for immortality. Untested poets, journalists, and others whose professional lives were at stake, rationalized their literary behavior at Niagara according to professional necessity. But most tourists could find no such rationalizations. With the "pen of a poet," they sought to preserve or fossilize their experience both for themselves and for their kin, while despairing of losing the immediacy and freshness of their experience. Recording their impressions on paper was one way tourists sought to preserve the memory of their experience.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Christian Schultz, Travels on an Inland Voyage Through the States of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and Through the Territories of Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi and New-Orleans, Performed in the Years 1807 and 1808 (Ridgewood, New Jersey: The Gregg Press, 1968), pp. 62-3. The Gregg Press "republished" this volume from an unknown printing.

¹⁶⁷ Tourists also sought to preserve their memory by carving their names on stone, wood, or anything else where there was room. People memorialized themselves. It was just as much a part of the trip as signing into a hotel. Tourists "conformed to the custom of the place by engraving [their] names in rock." (Schultz, op. cit., p. 65)

But what were their impressions within the context of preparation and anticipation, "indescribability" and disappointment? I shall first focus on specific images and experiences by identifying (1) favorite "vantage spots," (2) numerous comparisons of Niagara with other natural wonders and (3) specific experiences and observations about Niagara. Then, in section III, I shall concentrate on more general impressions of Niagara Falls.

The geography of human visitation is considerably

One tourist cut a small blaze on the "best tree [he] could find for the purpose." (T. C., A Ride to Niagara in 1809 (Rochester, New York: George P. Humphrey, 1915), p. 22.) Some trees in such well tramped spots as Goat Island were even "killed by reason of the countless names that [were] cut into their bark." (Parsons, op. cit., p. 24.) In spite of this, the practice was vigorously defended. DeVeaux provides an interesting rationalization in spite of the danger involved in carving names high in trees or on branches projecting out over the precipice.

It is not so much the expectation of fixing a lasting memorial, as the pleasure of having one's name recognized by some friend or acquaintance, in present or after some years. These momentos are like the registry of a public house, but possess a romantic interest that registers do not. Here on the dark rocks and wild forest trees of Niagara, mingled with names from every part of the world, will sometimes be found one dear to the hearts of the observer, and the object will be hailed with pleasure.

(DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 111.)

According to DeVeaux, the benefit to be gained from carving one's name is not to oneself, but rather to others. Wouldn't it have been wonderful, DeVeaux asks rhetorically, if the first European to visit Niagara had left his or her memorial, for it would have given much "satisfaction to modern inquirers. This is not useless labor; it is interesting to many, and will often afford some date and materials for the traveller and the historian." (DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 112.)

different today from what it was 150 years ago. There were three favorite "vantage points" during the first half of the nineteenth century. The most famous and usually considered the best view of Niagara Falls until 1833 was from a sheet of rock which projected over the gorge at the "brink" of the Canadian or "horseshoe" Falls. As a "continuation of the edge of the ledge of strata from which the torrent-flood is precipitated,"¹⁶⁸ it was situated to give "unison to the scene."¹⁶⁹ Fragments of Table Rock (from its "tabular aspect"¹⁷⁰) occasionally tumbled into the "hell of waters" below, adding a measure of excitement. The extension was large enough to hold several pilgrims and they could put their hands in the water as it cascaded over the "brink." Guidebooks recommended that pilgrims crawl to the edge of Table Rock and look down. Whether or not they accepted such dares on foot or belly is anybody's guess. No proper author ever said. Because Table Rock bordered the Falls, the river, to tourists looking upstream, apparently appeared as if it were going to overflow the Table Rock. Immediately in front of the spectator, it rushed by¹⁷¹ and just below,

¹⁶⁸Orr, op. cit., p. 155.

¹⁶⁹Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. XII, p. 47.

¹⁷⁰Orr, op. cit., p. 155.

¹⁷¹A popular and safe activity was to estimate the distance the water shot over the brink of the Falls. Another "curiosity" was the fondness pilgrims had for estimating the height of the Falls. Everybody was out measuring.

at the base of the Falls, was the "hell of waters." No wonder tourists complained of dizziness and terror. Furthermore, they took risks that no respectable park manager would allow today!¹⁷²

There were two major complaints with respect to Table Rock: (1) the falls were not loud enough and (2) the location was not "sufficiently in front" of the Falls. The first complaint was popular among those who favored a second principal vantage point. A ledge at the base of the precipice formed a path beside the "sheet of water" striking "fifty feet"¹⁷³ from the precipice. For those who dared to go "under the falls," the noise was sufficiently loud!¹⁷⁴ Tourists who "performed this exploit" were promised increased sublimity at the risk of death; for others, the shock was "excessive" and "there was no

In 1830, F. S. Eastman estimated the quantity of water pouring over the Falls as 670,255 tons per minute! (F. S. Eastman, A History of the State of New York from the First Discovery of the Country to the Present Time (New York: E. Bliss, 1828), p. 21.) Estimates varied on the height of the Falls themselves from 140 feet (Timothy Bigelow, Journal of a Tour to Niagara Falls in the Year 1805, with an introduction by a grandson, Abbott Lawrence (Boston: John Wilson and Sons, 1876), p. 58) to 167 feet (Lieber, op. cit., p. 341).

¹⁷²The material on Table Rock is especially extensive. See further Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. XII, pp. 42-4; Eastman op. cit., pp. 5-6; Gilpin, op. cit., p. 149; Hamilton, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 316-7; Orr, op. cit., pp. 154ff; Dixon, op. cit., pp. 117ff.

¹⁷³Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 100.

¹⁷⁴Some tourists preferred to identify this spot as "behind the Falls."

beauty to repay one for it."¹⁷⁵ In spite of the supposed danger of going "under the Falls," DeVeaux reports that as of 1841, "no accidents have happened." The attraction of this location was not that there was a distinct possibility of death, but rather tourists could "look danger in the face," and "move cheerily along, not troubling themselves with any disturbing thoughts" of lives lost under the Falls.¹⁷⁶ Beaufoy notes simply that "perilous as the walk under the Falls appears to be, there is not in reality much danger. Ladies continually venture there during the summer months."¹⁷⁷ Tourists could be relatively safe while feeling close to danger and death. That was attractive to them.

Entrepreneurs capitalized on the attraction of danger and sublimity. A "small establishment" provided, for a fee, both "raindresses" and guides. Ladies in their "oilskin concerns"¹⁷⁸ were apparently quite a sight -- "grotesque" in the words of one observer. But the trip up was even worse. The "protective" garments were like sponges, making the women more uncomfortable than they already were. But they "laughed heartily," paid their money dutifully and "continually ventured there during

¹⁷⁵ Gilman, op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁷⁶ DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 232.

¹⁷⁷ Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 101.

¹⁷⁸ Carr, op. cit., p. 21.

the summer months."¹⁷⁹

Tourists understandably mentioned the "heavy intense roar" of water in a "peculiar hurry and vehemence."¹⁸⁰ Under the Falls, glib assurances of guides notwithstanding, most tourists were afraid. The rocks were wet and slippery; there was no possibility of conversation; the area was dark. Tourists were blinded by the spray and found it difficult to breathe. Frances Wright marvelled that anyone could "play in the wind and foam that gush forth from the hidden depths of this watery cave."¹⁸¹

At the end of the path under the Falls was a rock aptly named "Termination Rock." This rock, 153 feet along the path, was reached by a surprising number of male pilgrims who considered it a challenge to their masculinity. As one of the most "dangerous" and impressive spots at Niagara Falls, it also inspired several poems. However, not everyone found it necessary to risk his or her life. Nathaniel Hawthorne had the best of both worlds -- roosting on Table Rock and only vicariously adventuring under the Falls. There is a note of cynicism in his description.

Leaning over the cliff, I saw the guide
conducting two adventurers behind the Falls.

¹⁷⁹Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 100.

¹⁸⁰Bigelow, op. cit., p. 63.

¹⁸¹Frances Wright, Views of Society and Manners in America, by an Englishwoman (London: 1822), p. 243.

It was pleasant from that high seat in the sunshine, to observe them struggling against the eternal storms of the lower regions, with heads bent down, now faltering, now pressing forward, and finally swallowed up in their victory. After their disappearance, a blast rushed out with an old hat, which had been swept from one of their heads. The rock to which they were directing their unseen course, is marked, at a fearful distance on the exterior of the sheet, by a jet of foam. The attempt to reach it appears both poetical and perilous on the exterior of the sheet. . . . In a few moments came forth the children of the mist. Dripping and breathless, they crept along the base of the cliff, ascended to the guide's cottage, and received, I presume, a certificate of their achievement, and three verses of sublime poetry on the back. 182

J. W. Orr confirms that which roused Hawthorne's amusement.

Drenched and dripping, you at last come forth, bearing upon your mind and memory, an impression that no time or change can ever erase; and with solemn steps and thoughtful mien, ascend the stairs, and resume your ordinary dress. Register your name, receive a certificate that you have been to the Termination Point, pay the customary charge, and then partake of refreshment. 183

A third vantage point became popular after 1833. Just off Goat Island, between the American and Horseshoe Falls, Terrapin Rock perched "on the verge of the precipice." At the extremity of the American Falls, "a high tower [had] been erected"¹⁸⁴ "boldly over the rushing flood." Built in 1833, Terrapin Tower was forty-five

¹⁸²Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. XII, pp. 47-8.

¹⁸³Orr, op. cit., p. 163.

¹⁸⁴Cather, op. cit., pp. 188-9.

feet high and was accessible only by a wooden bridge which projected beyond the Tower and over the brink of the Falls. Sufficiently in front of the Falls, it became the "crown and glory of the whole."¹⁸⁵ Tourists seeking a totality of involvement in the scene found it here, for they were surrounded by water on all sides, "a cataract tumbling down on the right hand and another on the left; nothing to be seen but sky and rocks and water; you are surrounded by the wild magnificence and feel yourself mingled with the sublimity of the scene."¹⁸⁶ Others were less excited about mingling with sublimity. "The sensation. . . is something quite horrid -- you feel as 'tho nothing could save you, but that you must go over, bridge and all."¹⁸⁷ Orr accurately reflected sentiments and lured tourists with his summary of the view. "Majesty, grandeur, sublimity, and beauty -- the glorious garniture of God, -- are here spread out before you."¹⁸⁸

Of course, there were other favorite locations for

¹⁸⁵ Gilman, op. cit., p. 114. It is interesting to note that the Terrapin Tower was severely criticized by several tourists as an unnecessary intrusion on a natural wonder otherwise barely touched by man. See especially Abdy, op. cit., I, p. 293; Coke, op. cit., II, p. 37; Gilman, op. cit., pp. 112-3; Dauberry, op. cit., p. 45; Tyrone Power, Impressions of America (Philadelphia: 1836), vol. I, pp. 400-1; DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 112; Duncan, op. cit., II, p. 33.

¹⁸⁶ Cather, op. cit., pp. 148-9.

¹⁸⁷ Carr, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁸⁸ Orr, op. cit., p. 130.

beholding and wondering.¹⁸⁹ Yet these three scenic points vied for the reputation of having the "best view," by which was meant the view with the most extravagant "riches for thought." Both immersion (under the Falls) and perspective (from Table Rock) were valued. But since Terrapin Tower combined both, it was increasingly favored as the century wore on. Yet this was complicated because "different points [views] seemed to be the center of focussed thought" in tourists' minds.

Mrs. Trollope found the center of Horseshoe Falls as "the most utterly inconceivable," and thus Table Rock, offering both closeness and perspective, offered the superior view. This was the consensus early in the century.

Before I leave the Great Falls, I may observe that having seen them from every accessible angle, I am satisfied that the best general view is from the Table Rock; though the finest and most terrific view of the Horseshoe Falls is from the bridge to the north side of [Goat] Island, and

¹⁸⁹Of course, there were other favorite locations for viewing the Falls, particularly near other lesser wonders. Those include the "whirlpool" and the "rapids" (both below the Falls) and to a lesser extent, "Ingraham's Cave" or the "Cave of the Winds." See further DeVeaux, op. cit., pp. 110, 130, 151, 178, 183, 189, and 192 for descriptions of these places. Disturnell's 1864 Guide also has some description of the rapids (op. cit., p. 116) as does Parson's Guide (op. cit., p. 21). Extensive comments on Niagara's other secondary wonders may be found in Francis Lieber, op. cit., pp. 354-5 and Margaret Fuller, op. cit., II, pp. 4-9. Neither the whirlpool or the rapids should be overlooked in the catalogue of natural wonders at Niagara. Beaufoy observed that "if the perpendicular did not exist, the rapids would be the grandest cataract in the universe." (Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 99) This highlights the importance of both the Falls and the secondary wonders.

the line and periphery of the pitch is best
seen from the precipice of the island. ¹⁹⁰

However, there was no commercial advantage in Table Rock, and therefore guidebook writers recommended the bottom of the "staircase" (or ladder) for the "most sublime view" of the cataract. By 1835, with the addition of Terrapin Tower and the increasingly complex geography of visitation, such statements became more qualified.

From Table Rock you have one broad and imposing view of the whole Falls, and much of the scenery of the rapids and islands. Many visitors prefer this view to any other; but it is generally conceded that the view from Terrapin Bridge is superior, -- it combines more of the beautiful and ¹⁹¹ the sublime.

The tide had turned. By 1839, A. T. Goodrich firmly stated that the "best and most central [view] is from the. . . .tower."¹⁹² Goodrich justified his opinion by analyzing the preferences of a great number of tourists. They wanted to be close, involved and immersed, even to touch the water. They chose to seek danger, to experience the "full force of the torrent," without being swept up by it, to experience the falls where "there is no intervening object between it and the sky."¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Notes of a Tour Through the Western Part of the State of New York in 1829, op. cit., pp. 40-1. See also Gurney, op. cit.

¹⁹¹ Parsons, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁹² A. T. Goodrich, The North American Tourist (New York: A. T. Goodrich, 1839), p. 76.

¹⁹³ Buckingham, op. cit., II, pp. 466-7.

Despite numerous objections,¹⁹⁴ tourists sought to place Niagara in a familiar context by comparing it to other natural wonders. The reason is obvious. "To form any idea of any grand natural object which one has never seen, one must be able to compare it to something that one has seen of approximating magnitude."¹⁹⁵ Clearly, European wonders were the principal contenders. But Niagara was not just one wonder, comparable to a European wonder; it was two! The American Falls (and the view from the American side) could be compared to the Horseshoe Falls (and the view from the Canadian side).

Interestingly, Americans seemed quite willing to swallow nationalist pride and recognize Canada's view as superior to that from the American side. Even guidebook writers "conceed that the view of the Falls from Canada surpasses any on the American side." "You have a full front view" as opposed to the "various prospects, piece by piece."¹⁹⁶ Another guidebook makes no commitment, saying only that "the views from [the Canadian] side are by many considered the best; but let everyone decide for himself from personal observation."¹⁹⁷ Richard Henry Dana, Jr. did precisely that. Goat Island in the middle of the river had the superior views, even though "the

¹⁹⁴For a discussion of these, see pages 400-404.

¹⁹⁵Blane, op. cit., p. 398.

¹⁹⁶DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁹⁷Parsons, op. cit., pp. 42-3.

British side is far finer" than the American side.¹⁹⁸

Why was the Canadian view favored: The shape of the American Falls was considered

unfortunate. A straight line is never favorable to beauty, and the cataract descends, not into a dark abyss of convulsed and fathomless waters, but amid fragments of rock, from which it again rushes onward to the main bed of the river.¹⁹⁹

Without the Horseshoe Falls the American Falls "alone would be accounted a wonder." However, next to Horseshoe, "it is for sometime difficult to bestow any attention on it."²⁰⁰

Swiss waterfalls provided a European connection. Several tourists quoted the 4th Canto of Byron's "Childe Harold," substituting the Falls of Niagara for the Falls of Terni. Beste was less prosaic, using the European comparison only to dismiss it.

Never was there a more beautiful prospect! I have seen the Falls of Tivoli, of Terni, of Schaffhausen: were there no Horseshoe Fall, the American Falls of Niagara would be incomparably the grandest -- as they are, even now, incomparably the most beautiful in the world. We could not linger. It was hopeless to try to look one's fill.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸Richard Henry Dana, Jr., The Journal of Richard Henry Dana, Jr., edited by Robert F. Lucid (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), I, p. 113.

¹⁹⁹Hamilton, op. cit., II, pp. 325-6.

²⁰⁰Bigelow, op. cit., p. 64.

²⁰¹J. Richard Beste, The Wabash: or, Adventures of an English Gentleman's Family in the Interior of America (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1855), I, p. 139.

Anna Jameson was less enthusiastic, although she said it was her own fault. "Terni, and some of the Swiss cata-racts leaping from their mountains" affected her more than Niagara. She looked up on arriving at Niagara, assuming that waterfalls all began above the viewer and was surprised to find that Niagara was below her. Her response to this initial disappointment is amusing.

The first moment, the first impression, is over -- is lost; something is gone that cannot be restored. What has come over my soul and senses? I am no longer Anna -- I am metamorphosed -- I am translated -- I am an ass's head, a clod, a wooden spoon, a fat weed growing on Lethe's bank, a stock, a stone, a petrification, -- for have I not seen Niagara, the wonder of wonders; and felt -- no words can tell what disappointment.²⁰²

An important comparison, because of its force, was not with other waterfalls, but with the crater of Vesuvius, which ranked among the world's most sublime wonders. Captain deRoos of the Royal Navy had "beheld some of the most celebrated sights of Nature; -- Etna and Vesuvius; the Andes, almost at their highest elevation -- Cape Horn, rugged and bleak, buffeted by the southern tempest, and, though last, not least, the long swell of the Pacific; but nothing I had ever seen or imagined, could compare in grandeur with the Falls of Niagara."²⁰³ Francis Lieber

²⁰²Slicer, op. cit., p. 117. Amusing comparisons are legion. Three of my favorites: "See Naples and die" was revised to "See Niagara and die." Niagara Falls was the "living and liquid Alps." (Rubio, op. cit., p. 89.) And from E. T. Coke: "How much more noble a deity, than the muddy, slow, sacred stream of the Ganges." (Coke, op. cit., II, p. 30.)

²⁰³deRoos, op. cit., pp. 173-4.

also had visited Vesuvius. He read over the journals of his trips to the volcano, but the "awfulness which it inspired was not to be compared to that produced by Niagara."²⁰⁴ "Awfulness" was a function of the "ingulfing character" -- the extent to which the Falls swallowed up the visitor. Again, note the aesthetic importance of "immersion."

Two further observations. DeRoos had mentioned the "long swells of the Pacific" as an appropriate comparison. Among water analogies, waterfalls themselves did not seem adequate, so the power of the ocean was introduced. For Bigelow, the "grandeur of the scene, is only to be exceeded by the ocean in some of its wildest moods." Lieber was less cautious.

The sea affects us by its boundlessness, and its thousand historical and geographical associations; by its horror and destruction at some times, and its graceful movements and refreshing coolness at others, and by the depth of its womb filled with the elements of life; Niagara affects us by its power, its horror, its grace, and its gigantic beauty all united.²⁰⁵

Related to the search for comparisons is the matter of associations. One European criticism of American wonders was their lack of historical associations.²⁰⁶ While American commentators strained to find significant

²⁰⁴Lieber, op. cit., p. 347.

²⁰⁵Ibid., p. 355.

²⁰⁶See chapter 3.

and universal historical associations for monuments celebrating events in the very recent past, at Niagara no apologies were needed. Everybody recognized that Niagara transcended such worldly concerns.

As Niagara is essentially a beauty of nature, and on a narrow spot in the new world, it is in my mind the counter picture to the views which I enjoyed from the tower of Acrocorinth, which, indeed, is one of the finest on earth for natural scenery; yet it is history which thrusts upon you there, as nature at Niagara. . . .Greece lay around me like one great epic, while Niagara is like a powerful ode, a rhapsody in which nature herself has seized the mighty harp²⁰⁷ and plays a rapturous tune.

From their three favorite "vantage points," tourists focussed on three related observations -- the danger, the rushing of water, and the "eternal" noise. Peering over the edge of Table Rock, going under the Falls as far as Termination Rock, creeping along Terrapin Bridge to its extension over the "brink," hanging in trees over the rushing water so as to carve one's name in the bark -- such adventures were justified because they permitted "immersion" or "total involvement." On the other hand,

²⁰⁷ Lieber, *op. cit.*, p. 356. Another interesting comment was made by this irresistible German tourist, who visited Niagara Falls in 1834. Readers will recall that Lieber, at Trenton Falls, objected to 'prating' guests when he announced that the proper attitude was silence. (See chapter 6) At Niagara Falls, Lieber introduces Dante! "There is not once, in Dante's whole poem, even an allusion to watery torment and horror; and yet how would he have seized upon the sight and wrought it into poetry." (Lieber, *op. cit.*, p. 345) That Dante, had he seen Niagara, might have "used the horrors of the water" instead of fire as the chief agent of infernal sufferings is a novel suggestion!

they were presumed to be dangerous. People sought to "face" danger while professing their fear of it; immersion and danger were two aspects of sublimity.²⁰⁸ Caroline Gilman lay down at the end of Terrapin Bridge with her head "over the fall" and gave herself up to the "overpowering greatness of the scene."²⁰⁹ Abdy compares an experience downstream with one near the brink. The

sense of security detracts something from the effect, the torrent has spent its rage; and after a few eddies, proceeds on its way in comparative tranquility; whereas the waves, as they roll and roar down the declining channel of the river, seem, with accumulated and accelerated force, to threaten the very ground on which you are standing. 210

Guidebooks emphasized the supposed dangers of Niagara to lure adventurers attracted by challenge and others for whom fear contributed to sublimity. One tourist expected a "sublimity undoubtedly extend[ing] to the very verge of horror."²¹¹ DeVaux itemized typical reactions of tourists to prepare others for Niagara.

Some look upon the Falls with feelings of dread and the impressions they leave on their minds are those of terror. . . . Many gentlemen have expressed themselves as experiencing very strange sensations, while beholding the Falls. Fear -- a perception of weakness -- trembling of the nerves; but

²⁰⁸See pp. 435ff.

²⁰⁹Gilman, op. cit., p. 114.

²¹⁰Abdy, op. cit., I, p. 289.

²¹¹Hamilton, op. cit., II, p. 319.

the predominant sensations are those of
reverence. 212

Most tourists discovered that the sensations of dread, terror, fear, weakness and reverence were related insofar as they reinforced each other. In those few rare cases where danger and fear were isolated, even if only for analytical purposes, visitors complained of "giddiness." "My head became giddy, and it seemed to me that every nerve was affected in the same way with those of the head." 213
It appeared as a loss of control.

I, who never was giddy in my life, felt a powerful effect when I looked up and followed, with my eye, a rushing arch in its whole course down; it was a sensation as if I were powerfully drawn after; and, indeed, I would not advise anyone, who is liable to giddiness to try this particular experiment. 214

As should be expected, the key danger points were Table Rock and the Terrapin Bridge and Tower. At Table Rock, tourists were impressed with the "idea that the whole of these hanging rocks will at some period fall down with a tremendous crash." 215 Table Rock, after all, was

a most perilous stand, a mere shelf or thin slab. . . .fissures already indicate that a speedy disruption. . . .will inevitably occur, but such is the heedlessness of man, and the thoughtlessness of the

212 DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 155.

213 Fowler, op. cit., p. 139.

214 Lieber, op. cit., p. 343.

215 John Melish, Travels in the United States of America in the Years 1806 and 1807, and 1809, 1810 and 1811 (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author by Thomas and George Palmer, 1812), p. 323.

ladies, that this is always the flirting place where ladies take their initiation into the wonders of the raging and conflicting elements beneath. 216

Probably several tourists secretly hoped that it would happen during their tenure at the Falls. Tourists experienced a "strange and indefensible fascination in the terrible depth, charming the eye with dread, and it requires an effort to withdraw from that horrible verge of danger and death." 217 And at Table Rock

Any person who has nerve enough [could] plunge his hand into the water of the Great Fall. . . .merely by lying down, flat, with his face beyond the edge of the Table Rock, and stretching his arm to its utmost extent. The experiment is a truly horrible one, and such as I would not wish to repeat; for even to this day, I feel a shuddering and recoiling sensation, when I recollect having been in the posture above described. 218

At Terrapin Bridge and Tower, the tale is even more lurid. These structures built by Augustus Porter in 1833 were "super-human efforts" and were greeted with "super-human" reactions.

The traveller that has thus far perilled his life to gratifying his vain and unbounded curiosity, and that says to himself, what man has done, men can do; and what others have not seen, I may also behold, perhaps, in safety, will not, perchance, withdraw from the bridge of the

²¹⁶Goodrich, op. cit., p. 81.

²¹⁷Orr, op. cit., p. 157.

²¹⁸Eastman, op. cit., p. 18.

tower without claiming the full fruition of his gratified curiosity as the reward of his hazardous and expensive journeyings. Of all appalling and terrible sites for man to place himself upon to glut his insatiable, presumptuous desire to draw near to the very brink of destruction, and to cast a withering, heart-sickening, trembling look into the vortex where no human being can enter but to be instantly passed into the abyss of eternity, this is the threshold to contemplate, creating horrible sensations of mingled fear and shrinking back of the heart and mind, in thus madly venturing into the presence of the power, that can annihilate in a moment all that thus profanely intrude into the domains between 219 time and eternity.

Behind or under the Falls was also a "fearful place! an imposing scene!" After returning from Termination Rock, Orr lapses into the imperative.

You feel that the struggle is terrific. Such sights! Such sounds! -- The eye aches: the ear is pained. But there is a dreadful fascination in the place: -- the eye looks eagerly, though it aches; the ear is pleased 220 with that which pains it.

Only the thought that numerous visitors had preceded the wary traveller could convince him (rarely her) that the "shadowy masses of that terribly attractive cavern" were not going to swallow up anyone who dared approach the end of the risky path. "Massy fragments, held by no visible support, seem almost in the act of falling; and you can hardly persuade yourself that danger is not imminent, and destruction at hand."²²¹

²¹⁹ Goodrich, op. cit., p. 80.

²²⁰ Orr, op. cit., pp. 161-2.

²²¹ Ibid.

A most significant element of "horrible danger" was the swiftly rushing water. From the apparent calm of the Niagara River immediately above the Falls, the water appeared to accelerate in a spurt of energy. The suddenness of the change from a "rapid and peaceful river" to a "cauldron of froth and spray"²²² was incomprehensible to many tourists. "The rock faded beneath" the smooth stream and everything was changed. Yet careful observation revealed agitation before the brink. The stream seemed to anticipate its fate, becoming increasingly "agitated. . . . rushing, passing from ridge to ridge, with irresistible violence, before sweep [ing] over the Falls."²²³ Then, as if in reverse motion, the water "boils up from below," shielded from view by clouds of mist and spray. Others plotted the flow of the river in comparable terms, emphasizing the suddenness of the transition from calm to confusion. Some went further. Just at the brink, the water seemed suspended in air. Tourists were entranced by specks of green and blue, particularly in the center of Horseshoe Falls.²²⁴ Tourists searched their experience for similar shades of color, but mostly compared them to European rivers. The "sea-green. . . .of an emerald hue" was similar to the "dye of the Neckar, yet the Niagara [was] much more beautiful."²²⁵ The Falls, in their passage

²²²Beste, op. cit., p. 135.

²²³DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 105.

²²⁴Coke, op. cit., II, p. 39ff.

²²⁵Lieber, op. cit., p. 346.

from calm to confusion and back to calm sparkled with and were animated by an array of colors.

Impressions of the water depended in part on the vantage point. Christian Schultz settled himself at Table Rock and wrote of his "fair view of the whole fall, rushing with such incredible swiftness over the precipice to the unfathomable abyss below." Yet he "instinctively made a voluntary retreat of a step or two, fearful of being overwhelmed in the vast descent of waters."²²⁶ Frederick Marryat expressed similar feelings -- a

slight dizziness and creeping sensation
 . . . arising from strong excitement. . . .
 This is a feeling which, if too long
 indulged in, becomes irresistible, and
 occasions a craving desire to leap into
 the flood of rushing waters. ²²⁷

Under the Falls, the overwhelming "magnitude and force" of the water -- its sheer "accumulation" -- led Duncan to ponder "from what source so immeasurable a volume of fresh water could be constantly poured forth."²²⁸ (He had not yet visited the Great Lakes). From the same position, Orr was struck by the "irregularity" of the rock formations which, in giving it variety, also resulted in a

wild and singular beauty. The water. . . .
 possesses so much variety with so complete
 a unity, that it not only awes but delights,
 and you almost forget its immensity in the
 contemplation of its beauty. ²²⁹

²²⁶Schultz, op. cit., p. 64.

²²⁷Marryat, op. cit., p. 111.

²²⁸Duncan, op. cit., II, p. 46.

²²⁹Orr, op. cit., pp. 114-5.

The water "leapt," it did not tumble. It had personality, like the "fury of a lion, who leaps with fury upon his prey."²³⁰ McKenney summarizes the general image of Niagara's immensity and power.

Onward! -- Over! -- are the only words that can convey the impression arising from the sight of the rapids above, and the falls below. They appear to be the words spoken by the Eternal when the hurrying, and splashing, and foaming scene of the rapids commenced; and when their waters first made their pitch into the awful profound. 231

The everpresent noise of Niagara contributed to the mood of "horrible danger." Even if lives were not threatened, it affected tourists. The continual pounding was "very sublime, giving the effect of a spiritual regeneration through all the spheres." It was the same "incessant, rumbling, deep, monotonous tone accompanied by the tremour which is observable in a . . . gristmill of large dimensions."²³² Usually, the noise at Niagara preceded the first view of the Falls, so that anticipations were first confronted with the sound of rushing water.

I could only see part of the Horseshoe Fall, and consequently had no idea of the sublime part of the precipice below the Fall; but I heard a continual noise from the falling mass of water; and felt the whole house shake to its very foundation. I listened every moment with eagerness to the sound. 233

²³⁰ Lieber, op. cit., p. 347.

²³¹ McKenney, op. cit., p. 95.

²³² Hall, op. cit., I, p. 189.

²³³ Arfwedson, op. cit., II, p. 313.

It was said that one could hear the falls 30 miles distant, if the wind was right!

How did tourists characterize the noise at Niagara Falls? It "assumed a solemn character; it might be likened to a language from an unknown world."²³⁴ There were varieties of sounds. There was a deep, steady roar punctuated by the occasional crashes of "thunders between," and a "shrill, piercing sound very much like the horn or trumpet of one of the stagecoachmen." Lieber attributed this last sound to bubbles of compressed air seeking escape, "well comparable to the trumpets of evil spirits sounding from the abyss of torment."²³⁵ The first two sounds were ever present; the third often went unnoticed. Duncan apologized for describing the droning bass tones as "thunder[ing] in the ear most overpoweringly," because he said it failed to convey "any adequate idea of the awfully deep and unvarying sound."²³⁶ Beaufoy identified the "same, deep, solemn roar, unvarying and unchangeable . . . as that which connects all the variations in the Falls."²³⁷ Under the Falls, the noise was intense.

You see the Falls from above. . . .you hear the Falls from below. When you approach from below, your ears seem gradually to lose all sense of hearing, and for some minutes, you are doubtful

²³⁴Ibid., p. 320.

²³⁵Lieber, op. cit., p. 353.

²³⁶Duncan, op. cit., II, p. 46.

²³⁷Beaufoy, op. cit., p. 98.

whether you really possess that faculty²³⁸
or not.

For most, the faculty did function, and they "racked
[their] brain[s] to discover what the sound of the cata-
ract really did resemble."²³⁹ Coke had the most interest-
ing list: a "vast quantity of flour-mills at work, or
large manufactories at work in the immediate vicinity,
numerous carriages driving at a furious rate along the
road, the surf at Madras," even a "common waterfall."²⁴⁰
DeVeaux conjured up some others -- "intonations of a bass
drum, -- the slow, solemn and heavy report of artillery, --
the swelling note of the trumpet, -- even the human voice
in agony."²⁴¹ Whatever the metaphor, tourists wished to
convey intensity, "peculiar hurry and vehemence."²⁴²

And it never stopped. At nightfall, tourist's
could rest their eyes, but not their ears. If anything,
the sound seemed to grow more intense. While still some
distance from the Falls, Frances Wright reported this
experience.

In the night, when all was still, I heard
the first rumbling of the cataract.
Wakeful from over-fatigue, rather than
from any discomfort in the lodging, I
rose more than once to listen for the
first time, without emotion. Opening

²³⁸Schultz, op. cit., p. 66.

²³⁹Coke, op. cit., II, p. 40.

²⁴⁰Ibid.

²⁴¹DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 106.

²⁴²Bigelow, op. cit., p. 63.

the window, the hoarse low thunder distinctly broke the silence of the night; when, at intervals, it swelled more deep and full, you will believe, that I held my breath to listen; they were solemn moments. 243

Other tourists experienced "discomfort" from the noise, rather than "solemn moments." Thomas Hamilton's sleep was hindered by dreams encouraged, he thought, by the roar. Whenever he closed his eyes, "there was a torrent foaming before them." He saw the Horseshoe in his mind, "and the noise of the cataract, mingling with visions of a perturbed imagination, contributed to keep up the delusion."²⁴⁴ Poor Mr. Hamilton became "feverish" from the loss of sleep. The noise also "mingled" with Nathaniel Hawthorne's dreams, making them full of "storm and whirlwind." Whenever he awoke, he "heard this dread sound in the air, and the winds rattling as with a mighty blast." He could not rest until he assured himself that the world had not blown away. "Never was summer night more calm to the eye, nor the gale of autumn louder to the ear."²⁴⁵

The noise, so loud that some people reported having lost their hearing, inevitably disappointed some pilgrims. "They expected it to be heavier and louder. Nothing but bursting boilers, roaring cannons, pealing thunder, or crashing earthquakes can come up to the expectations of

²⁴³Wright, op. cit., p. 237.

²⁴⁴Hamilton, op. cit., II, p. 318.

²⁴⁵Hawthorne, op. cit., XII, p. 46.

some persons."²⁴⁶ Schultz was one who found the noise "far less than [he] had anticipated."²⁴⁷ Yet, as was so often the case, the "first prepossessions wore away" and travellers became impressed with the "solemnity of the sound."²⁴⁸ The general impression of the roaring cataract was positive, at least if the guidebooks are at all correct.

The ceaseless roar. . . .diffuses thru
the mind a feeling of ungovernable awe
. . . .A scene like this is not to be
described, -- it is only to be felt. ²⁴⁹

The "ceaseless roar" was indescribable, for the sound was not the "inexpressibly soothing" sound of "ordinary scenes" -- the "rippling of the sea on a pebbly beach, the murmuring of a brook, or the gushing of a fountain." "Niagara with its thundering voice and rushing flood mantled in spray and white with foam, absolutely stuns the mind of the spectator, and excites mingled emotions of admiration and awe."²⁵⁰

Danger, water in motion and noise -- these are the three important building blocks of the general impressions tourists had at Niagara Falls.²⁵¹ Individually, they

²⁴⁶DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 108.

²⁴⁷Schultz, op. cit., p. 64.

²⁴⁸Dauberry, op. cit., p. 45.

²⁴⁹Gilpin, op. cit., p. 147.

²⁵⁰Cather, op. cit., p. 147.

²⁵¹This is not to say that there were not others, for there were. The "eternal rainbow" (eternal when the sun shone),

excited admiration and awe. Collectively, they elicited a pious sentimentality in which, once again, the language of Scottish Common Sense Realism and British Romanticism was tried by overuse. While pilgrims resorted to a popular religiousness of language, there are flashes of a genuine spiritual response to Niagara Falls.

III. Religiosity at Niagara Falls

General impressions of Niagara Falls, emerging from the dialogue of anticipation and reality, are laced with religious sentimentality. A surface religiousness of language seems to indicate superficial piety. But granting that what we have investigated are popular expressions, I do not believe that they are therefore meaningless. If nothing else, they are indices of the folk religiousness

storms at the Falls, winter at the Falls and the experience of Niagara by moonlight were highly regarded. An important iconological study would be a consideration of the moon in images of nature. Niagara Falls would play a prominent role in such a project. See especially Duncan, op. cit., II, p. 47; Augustus C. Murray, op. cit., p. 262; deRoos, op. cit., pp. 159-60, 132-3; Gilman, op. cit., p. 115; Coke, op. cit., II, p. 30; Mary Murray (1825), op. cit., n.p. As the century wore on, visits to Niagara during the winter became increasingly common. Ice floes and frozen spray as well as winter storms and spring floods heightened summer images and may be considered as a unit. See especially Darby, op. cit., p. 165; deRoos, op. cit., p. 164; Orr, op. cit., pp. 106-111; Disturnell 1842 Gazetteer, op. cit., pp. 290-1; Jane and Marion Turnbull, American Photographs (London: T. C. Newby, 1859), Vol. I, pp. 114-7. See also the works of Bayard Taylor, who concluded that the best time to visit Niagara was the winter. Rainbows are noted in almost every guidebook, diary and journal. See especially Orr, op. cit., pp. 104-5; Gurney, op. cit., p. 320.

of persons, fashionable and unfashionable, who took the "Tour" from New York to Niagara. Certainly the language of Common Sense Realism and the mood of Romanticism characterized the sentiments of travellers. Furthermore, tourists, responding to the natural wonders of upstate New York, expressed conventional Christian religiosity. Let us examine this more carefully.

One conclusion of this study may now be stated. For the majority of tourists, the enthusiasm (expressed in a religiousness of language) for a given natural wonder was proportional to its commonly accepted position in the hierarchy of wonders. This can hardly be startling, but at least one corollary is important. Despite the attempt to "say something fresh and new," tourists' responses were rarely creative. They follow a pattern, for cultural prescriptions play a central role in the folk images of natural wonders. Pine Orchard and Trenton Falls drew attention according to their prescription. Lesser wonders drew only a thin veneer of religiosity as tourists saved their expressions of enthusiasm for Niagara Falls. We should expect, therefore, that Niagara would elicit a consistent and full-blown religiousness of language. That is, in fact, the case.

Religious terminology was used for two purposes: (1) to characterize a feeling of awe and a response of silence and (2) to identify some previously held theological notion affirmed in confrontation with Niagara.

Meditation and contemplation have never been

favorite modalities of faith in American religion -- more important have been the agility and busyness of "muscular" Christianity. But at Niagara, both Americans and tourists from overseas were hushed into silence and reverence. Tourists "meditated" at Niagara Falls. American DeVaux suggested that given the proper circumstances, such a response was necessarily forthcoming.

When nature's might some wondrous scene unfolds,
And awe-struck man the glorious work beholds,
In silence fix'd -- the 'enrapt imagination --
More than loud words, shows forth its admiration.²⁵²

Nevertheless, Americans were considerably less convincing in reporting their contemplative experiences than European visitors. Lafayette's companion, Lavasseur, remained on Table Rock for over half an hour "silently contemplating the rapid fall of the water, and stunned by the noise of its terrible roaring."²⁵³ Only someone wishing to share some technical information roused him from his reverie, as was John Fowler from his.

I was recalled to the vapidness of life, and, like one just roused from a trance, retraced my steps to the shore: but the impression remains fixed, and permanent, and vivid, as when stamped upon the mind, and when I lose the recollection of that hour, and that scene, time must have drawn its veil over all that I would cherish, and thought and memory become extinct; -- I must cease to live. The reader will forgive me this digression -- rhapsody, or whatsoever he is pleased to term it; the feelings of the moment were ardent and irresistible, inspired by the majesty of the

²⁵²DeVaux, op. cit., p. 154.

²⁵³Lavasseur, op. cit., p. 186.

scene: they can never recur again but
upon a like occasion -- at the same spot.²⁵⁴

Basil Hall, whose articulateness we have noted throughout this study, was equally articulate at Niagara Falls. At Table Rock, he felt "staggered and confused," experiencing a "sensation bordering on alarm." Unable to locate the source of that feeling, he could only identify a "strong mysterious sort of impression that something dreadful might happen." Hall, usually controlled the "reins of imagination;" at other times, he lost control and "tried to follow, with no great success, some of the innumerable trains of wild and curious reflections which arose in consequence -- though, after all, nothing can be conceived more vague than those wandering thoughts, except it be their present, ghost-like recollection." These hours were among the "most interesting" in his life. He lapsed in and out of "fanciful vagaries," becoming "more than half unconscious" of the natural phenomenon beside him.

Basil Hall termed his experience a "high," a heightened state of consciousness today often associated with drugs. It was available to anyone willing to "sacrifice," according to one commentator, and daring enough to expose himself to the dangers inherent in being intimate with the Falls. This parallel to drug-induced altered states of consciousness is not my own -- it is Hall's.

²⁵⁴Fowler, op. cit., p. 140.

The effect of this mighty cataract upon the mind, might perhaps be worthy of the attention of a metaphysician. With me, at least, the influence of one overpowering but indefinite sensation at times absorbed the active operation of the senses, and produced a kind of dizzy reverie, more or less akin to sleep, or rather to the intoxication described by opium eaters, during which a thousand visions arose connected with the general sentiment of sublimity.

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His "over-indulging fancy," especially for so proper, if outspoken, an Englishman, caught him once "thinking that [he] had left this lower world for the upper sky" where he frolicked with a company of luminaries including Sir Isaac Newton.

On awakening from his reveries, from his "roving commissions of the mind, to the stupendous reality," Hall apologizes to his readers for his extravagance. He concludes by stating that Niagara brings out the spiritual in every man. Niagara was therefore particularly important for those whose spiritual sensibilities were not tuned to the sensations an educated and more aware person might feel at lesser wonders. For the average tourist, what Trenton Falls lacked in sublimity was more than made up at Niagara, for Niagara could arouse in the common man emotions usually experienced only by persons like Wordsworth, who saw the world in a daffodil. Hall is clear on this point. The "roving commissions of the mind" and a

hundred other extravagances. . . . however absurd they must of course seem in sober prose, may possibly give some notion of

²⁵⁵ Hall, op. cit., I, p. 353.

the effect produced by looking at the Falls of Niagara -- an effect analogous, perhaps, to that produced on the mind of the poet in ordinary circumstances, but which less imaginative mortals are made conscious of,²⁵⁶ only on very extraordinary occasions.

Basil Hall was an educated and discriminating man. J. W. Orr was similar only in that he too was pompous. His enthusiasm for Niagara was uncritical and open to the charge of superficiality. Yet while it would be easy to dismiss Orr's "prating," to do so would be to ignore the popular images of Niagara Falls. In spite of a programmed sentimentality, his enthusiasm for Niagara was genuine and authentic. Originality and profundity are not the only criteria for authenticity. In Orr's work, we see an accurate summation of early nineteenth century images; what one might call genuine superficiality. Some critics may wish to emphasize its superficiality; I prefer to emphasize its genuineness.

Imagination holds her undisputed away; -- but the half-concealment that shrouds every object, confines her to the task of filling up the shadowy outline of the vast indistinct that is everywhere around. It seems a spirit-land, and gigantic forms of inessential grace and beauty float before the vision, upon the atmosphere of fancy. Hushed is the voice of mirth, silent the tongue of conviviality. The Actual blends with the Ideal: contemplation rules the hour and the place; and a subdued, but not dismal, melancholy pervades every brow and bosom. No sound is heard, but the choral chaunt of the elements: no sentiment is breathed, but such as befits the spot, and the season. The Genius of Niagara, hovering near, spreads his misty pinions over all

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

things: and the whole scene is hallowed 257
by the invisible presence of Deity.

Some tourists were more particular about their contemplations. Benjamin Dorr listened to the "awful roar" and watched the water "impetuously rushing towards" him, thinking of that "awful day, when the foundations of the 'great deep were broken up' and 'every valley and every high hill was covered' by the overwhelming deluge."²⁵⁸ Frederick Marryat wished he were "a magician, that [he] might transport the Falls to Italy, and pour their whole volume of waters into the crater of Mount Vesuvius; witness the terrible conflict between the contending elements, and create the largest steam-boiler that ever entered into the imagination of man."²⁵⁹ Ancients on this side of the Atlantic also played in the imaginings of tourists. Margaret Fuller confessed to "unsought and unwelcome images such as never haunted [her] before, or naked savages stealing behind [her] with uplifted tomahawks; again and again this illusion recurred and even after [she] had thought it over, and tried to shake it off, [she] could not help starting and looking behind."²⁶⁰ But perhaps the most surprising dream was that of Caroline Gilman. Her romantic sensibility was no doubt capable of such images. "I have listened to their roar, I have sprung often to the

²⁵⁷Orr, op. cit., p. 165.

²⁵⁸Dorr, op. cit., p. 12.

²⁵⁹Marryat, op. cit., p. 111.

²⁶⁰Margaret Fuller, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 5.

windows to see the white foam glitter, and rise and die away upwards, like thoughts that blend with heaven, and I have felt a spell in my soul as if Deity stood visibly there."²⁶¹

In the attempt to describe the contemplative or meditative mood at Niagara, two words "beauty" and "sublime" were again used with such regularity and in so many contexts that they became meaningless. Only second-rate scenes did not arouse emotions of sublimity or beauty. We have already noted that every view of any merit from New York to Niagara was either beautiful or sublime. In an attempt to assure the value of the American landscape, the language of description was de-valued.

Tourists despaired of saying anything new; the scenery at Niagara had been described so many times before. And of course, the words "beauty" and "sublimity" had been used repeatedly in all these descriptions. John Duncan, unremarkable in most ways, was obviously frustrated.

The Falls of Niagara have been so frequently described, and the whole vocabulary of sublimity so completely exhausted in the service, that it seems doubtful whether it would not be better to pass them by in silence, and refer you for an account of them to the narratives of former travellers. I am more desirous to sketch a correct picture of the moral, than the physical characteristics of America, and yet it would be perhaps improper that the latter should be altogether excluded. . . . If I cannot be poetical, I shall try at least to²⁶² be correct.

²⁶¹Gilman, op. cit., p. 108.

²⁶²Duncan, op. cit., II, pp. 31-2.

Understandably, since even staid old Basil Hall experienced the Falls as a sort of hallucinogen, there was little emphasis on "correct" physical descriptions. "Beauty" and "sublimity" were terms of the "poetical" mode -- the meat and potatoes of landscape prose and poetry. Despite this boring diet, a few generalizations can be made. The term "sublime" usually described the whole of Niagara Falls. In its totality, Niagara Falls was sublime; "Grand" and "majestic" were often used as synonyms. The broad expanse of the Hudson River Valley viewed from Pine Orchard was sublime in its scope and dimensions; beautiful in its component parts.²⁶³ On a larger scale, the same applies to Niagara.

Wherein, it may be asked, lies its acknowledged sublimity? Is it in the rocks and the precipices over which an immense sea of foam is dashing. . . .No! . . .There is nothing to be seen but a vast body of smooth water pouring over the abrupt edge of a perpendicular rock in one unbroken mass. . . .There is no. . . .splendid scenery here to attract the curious eye of the wonder-hunter. . . .It is quite enough of itself to fill the mind with all the awe and admiration which such subjects are capable of inspiring. 264

Beauty was more isolated and less grand. Because beauty was identified with specific locations and occasions, comparisons of beauty were possible. Behind the veil of sublimity lay images of beauty, even if fleeting.

²⁶³See chapter 4.

²⁶⁴Wilkie, op. cit., p. 102.

Tremendous torrent! For an instant hush
 The terrors of thy voice, and cast aside
 Those wild involving shadows; that my eyes
 May see the fearful beauty of thy face. ²⁶⁵

The scene as a whole was sublime (or "grand") although
 specific elements of the scene were beautiful.

The roaring and foaming of the rapids. . . .
 before the river arrives at the precipice;
 the green tint of the water, edged. . . .
 by curling folds of snow-white foam; the
 immediate chasm of boiling snow into which
 the river pours; the mist that eternally
 hovers over the gulf below. . . .the
 rapidity with which the green and white
 current drives along as if in haste to
 escape from the horrible chasm in which
 it had been engulfed, form altogether a
 scene of beauty and grandeur, unrivalled.
 I feel content that I have taken the
 journey. It was worth the trouble. ²⁶⁶

James Dixon, a Methodist preacher who toured the
 midwest in 1849, prepared a most interesting discussion
 of beauty. He sat on Table Rock "with a sort of vacant
 astonishment," confused by the incomprehensibility of the
 whole scene. "It is grand! it is sublime! it is awful!"
 crossed his mind: but he could not focus his sentiments.
 The scene overwhelmed him. Finally, "as if awakening from
 a dream," he exclaimed, "How beautiful! . . .Ah yes, that
 is it, that is it, -- it belongs to the beautiful!" This
 was a new idea for him, "a revelation, and transformed the
 whole scene in an instant into perfect unity and glory."²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵DeVeaux, op. cit., p. 104.

²⁶⁶C. T., op. cit., p. 21.

²⁶⁷Dixon, op. cit., pp. 113-4.

Clearly, the aesthetic fix of Scottish Common Sense Realism and British Romanticism was a stumbling block to viewing Niagara Falls with freshness and openness. While Dixon's "revelation" hardly broke through the contemporary aesthetic mold, it does support our distinction between the sublime and the beautiful. With his "new instrument," Dixon began to examine the several objects around; endeavored to analyze, to separate the elements, to watch the extraordinary movements of the liquid machine which was moving so majestically around [him]; and yet at the same time, to combine, to grasp the whole."²⁶⁸

Precisely this combination of beauty and sublimity was what set Niagara apart from other natural wonders -- from high mountain ranges (examples of the sublime) and waterfalls of great height (examples of the beautiful). Niagara Falls combined the majesty and grandeur of the sublime with the delicacy and the rich textures of the beautiful. Like the view from Pine Orchard, which size and expansiveness made sublime, and which the richness of detail made beautiful, Niagara Falls was unusual because it combined these two aesthetic categories. Dixon tells it himself.

Is beauty compatible with sublimity? Can the two attributes exist in one and the same object? Must the sublime be necessarily devoid of the beautiful? Must the beautiful be destitute, per se, of the sublime? These are questions which have engaged the attention of great authorities. Generally speaking, they seem to have entertained the notion

²⁶⁸Dixon, op. cit., p. 114.

that the ideas are incompatible; that the beautiful and the sublime belong to different and separate departments, whether of nature or of thought; and that no union, no harmony or concord of circumstances can blend the beautiful with the sublime, or the sublime with the beautiful, constituting them one and the same object. We venture to differ from these authorities; and our proof, our demonstration, is the Falls of Niagara. ²⁶⁹

Dixon's first impression had been one of sublimity -- "the scene is too palpable, too imposing, too overwhelming" to be otherwise. "The subject admits not of reasoning, it is a matter of mere sensation." Dixon recognized that many tourists had not described their sensations as he did, but doubts that anyone could not have felt Niagara's "power and been subdued into reverence and awe." "Homage" was paid, whether it was recognized as such or not. For Dixon, he was physically paralyzed by

an irresistible fascination seizing all [his] faculties, as if overshadowed by the presence of a mystic power, whose voice was heard in the thunder of many waters, as well as his majesty seen in the grandeur of every object around. ²⁷⁰

After reflection, the initial sublime sentiments were broadened to include "sensations of pleasure and happiness" which Dixon recognized as sentiments of the beautiful. "Heaven was most propitious!" He began to isolate elements of the scene employing his new power, "the idea of the beautiful." He observed the changing colors -- "yellow at the crest of the falls," green as it began to

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

fall, and then a "perfect white." "Intense gazing" also revealed that the "smooth, glassy, streamlike surface. . . . broke into crystals, as the dew-drops of the morning."²⁷¹ He followed the water crystals down to their destiny in the river below, examining their change in shape, size, colors and everything else he thought he could examine. Dixon stumbled upon a widely held conclusion: the uniqueness of Niagara was its combination of beautiful parts into one sublime whole.

Other tourists support Dixon's explanation of Niagara's unique combination of the sublime and the beautiful, though none was as detailed in his reasoning or explanations. Enthusiasm is no substitute for articulateness, but clearly Thomas Cather was trying to say what Dixon had said better.

Someone has compared it to an ocean tumbling over a precipice, but no language can describe its magnificence. Words fail me when I speak of it. It combines in the highest degree, sublimity and beauty -- awfully sublime, terribly beautiful. How brightly do its snowy waters flash in the sunshine and the spray cloud that hangs over it sparkles like a glory. 'God hath set his rainbow on its forehead,' and its deep voice seems to proclaim his Almighty power. 272

Finch expressed the same sentiment -- "nothing can equal its beauty -- nothing can surpass its sublimity."²⁷³ But

²⁷¹Ibid., p. 115.

²⁷²Cather, op. cit., p. 147.

²⁷³I. Finch, Travels in the United States of America, containing Some Account of their Scientific Institutions, and a

Orr, whose uncritical enthusiasm for Niagara we have noted, summarizes this popular observation in detail and with typical ardor.

The whole beautiful cascade hangs like a flashing curtain. . . .the scene is lovely beyond comparison. Nothing on earth can compare in that respect with the American Fall, as seen from this spot. Vast as it is, you do not observe its size; lofty as it is, you scarcely perceive its grandeur; -- its surpassing loveliness, and transcendent beauty alone seem to engage your attention. Finally, however, all these become blended together, and you begin to realize the majesty, as well as the loveliness; the sublimity, as well as the beauty of this incomparable cascade, and to feel that the power as well as the goodness of the Divine Architect, has here its lasting and visible impress. Long will that glorious scene live in your memory, hallowed by the recollection of a holy, rapture and an earnest worship. 274

Another combination of contrasting elements described Niagara. In addition to sublimity and beauty, continuity and change were experienced simultaneously. Of course, the Falls rushed with force and determination. At the same time, it gave the illusion of standing still by always flowing in the same general pattern. Focussing on the constant flow of water, tourists reflected on the mutability, precariousness and mortality of all life while impressed by the constancy of the flow, and the reliability of the process. Margaret Fuller outlined this observation.

Few Notices of the Geology and Mineralogy of Those Countries.
(London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman, 1833), p. 331.

²⁷⁴Orr, op. cit., p. 137.

There is no escape from the weight of perpetual creation, all other forms and motions come and go, the tide rises and recedes, the wind, at its mightiest, moves in gales and gusts, but here is really an incessant, an indefatigable motion. Awake or asleep, there is no escape, still this rushing around you and through you. It is in this way I have most felt the grandeur -- somewhat eternal, if not infinite. 275

The "indefatigable motion" from which there was "no escape" -- dreadful because of its power and strength -- was tempered by constancy. It was controlled -- it came "like the March of Destiny; it was not taken by surprise, but seemed to have anticipated in all its course through the broad lakes, that it must pour their collected waters down this height."²⁷⁶ Tourists were amazed that they, insignificant human beings, could actually touch the image of sublimity and beauty from Table Rock or go under it with little danger to their own lives, unless of course, they made a human error. Of course, the Falls could not err! Francis Lieber called it "steadiness."

There is, though it may sound strange to you, a character of majestic steadiness in Niagara Falls. Those gigantic masses preserve their compact form, throughout one half of their entire fall, and as they roll over the precipice and descend to midway, almost unchanged, present such an unbroken front, that the whole picture has about it an appearance as if the waters had been commanded to stand still, and had been suddenly stopped in their course. 277

²⁷⁵Margaret Fuller, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 3.

²⁷⁶Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. XII, p. 47.

²⁷⁷Lieber, op. cit., p. 349.

Niagara was favorably compared to the "rise and fall of dynasties and empires, to contests of kings, and crash of thrones [and] the fate of nations" to emphasize the immobility and steadiness of Niagara.²⁷⁸ The contrast between "steadiness" and the rushing water gave to Niagara another unique aspect.

Several tourists dredged up ancient racial memories of floods and other cataclysmic events to assure themselves of Niagara's constancy, and its "brotherhood with the living ocean and the eternal hills."²⁷⁹ "Still. . . . still. . . .still. . . .always. . . .always," intoned Charles Dickens, surveying that which "haunted" Niagara with "the same dread solemnity since Darkness brooded on the deep, and that first flood before the Deluge -- Light -- came rushing on Creation at the Word of God."²⁸⁰ This "never-ending conflict, this eternal march of the elements"²⁸¹ flows

onwards. . . .onwards. . . .onwards. . . .
A sentiment of infinitude, of eternity
oppressed the mind. . . .Down, down they
ever fall. So have they done since the
world was made, so will they continue to
do while the world endures. The voice of
the Lord is upon the waters: the God of
majesty speaketh in the thunder: the

²⁷⁸Orr, op. cit., p. 94.

²⁷⁹Elizabeth Ellet, Rambles About the Country (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon and Webb, 1840), (Published under the sanction of the Board of Education of the State of Massachusetts, Juvenile Series, Vol. 9.), p. 256.

²⁸⁰Dickens, op. cit., p. 386.

²⁸¹Darby, op. cit., pp. 161-2.

earth trembled and shook: the Lord
ruleth the floods: the Lord is forever.²⁸²

Seen from another perspective, the power and the awesomeness of Niagara magnifies the insignificance of man. Guidebooks were remarkably straightforward in this matter. Parsons is a good example.

How little and insignificant do the effects of man appear, when measured by this exhibition of Omnipotence! The earthquake, the volcano, the wide-open conflagration, the shock of contending armies are sublime and terrific spectacles, though short in their continuance and limited in their effects; but here, ever since the flood probably, the deafening and incessant roar of the mightiest cataract on the globe has called upon the children of man to fall down and adore their Maker!²⁸³

Orr is similar. After a long list of all the features of Niagara which make it sublime,

the mind recoils from its contemplation, and the soul, filled with awe, bows itself in reverent humility, feeling the Omnipotent presence. God is here made manifest, by the wonderful display of his Almighty power, that disbelief vanishes, pride sinks abashed, and the conviction of the heart and soul is -- How great is God! how insignificant am I! -- He is omnipotent; I am nothing!²⁸⁴

In the same vein, Charles A. Murray challenged anyone to test their "haughtiness" at the cataract, with the expectation that everybody must necessarily be humbled. Sitting at the foot of Niagara was therapy for the sin of pride. The prideful few were urged to "mediate on the

²⁸²Beste, op. cit., pp. 137-7. See also Dixon, op. cit., p.119.

²⁸³Parsons, op. cit., p. 38.

²⁸⁴Orr, op. cit., p. 130.

littleness of man, and on the attributes of Him, who metes out those waters in the hollow of his hand."²⁸⁵ Arfwedson hoped a note of authority would issue from using a form of English usually associated with religiosity. "Boast afterwards, weak creature, without blushing of thine own strength, thy extensive plans, thy great performances, when thou recollectest what thou wast at the foot of Niagara."²⁸⁶ Buckingham goes further in using Niagara as a moral weapon. People are evil because we are the "living, feeling, thinking, reflecting, reasoning and hoping inhabitants of such a world" as Niagara also inhabits. "Overwhelmed and overawed," why, in such a situation, should man engage in the pettiness of war and self-glory? Buckingham, of course, had no answer -- but he does find Niagara to be a judgment on our prideful ways.²⁸⁷

Other visitors to Niagara varied the observation of insignificance. Benjamin Dorr reversed the issue. Given man's insignificance, he asked "Lord, what is man that thou are mindful of him?"²⁸⁸ Beaufoy clarified the issue, but did not stoop to judgment.

I know it is the custom to talk of man sinking into insignificance beside the mighty works of nature; but I beg to differ on this subject. If it is meant, that the works of man become insignificant by comparison, I agree with the truth; but

²⁸⁵ Charles A. Murray, op. cit., pp. 67-8.

²⁸⁶ Arfwedson, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 316-7.

²⁸⁷ Buckingham, op. cit., III, p. 457.

²⁸⁸ Dorr, op. cit., p. 13.

I never think human nature so ennobled when I think of that world which has given us as an inheritance. The Falls of Niagara and other sublime objects make me more feelingly alive to the powers and goodness of the Supreme Being, but certainly do not cause me to repine at the natural advantages of my species. ²⁸⁹

More psychologically realistic was Basil Hall's analysis of Beaufoy's feelings, for he holds insignificance and pride in a mutually informing tension. At the Falls, he was

staggered and confused, and at times experienced a sensation bordering on alarm -- I did not know well at what -- a strong mysterious sort of impression that something dreadful might happen. At one moment I looked upon myself as utterly insignificant in the presence of such a gigantic, moving, thundering body -- and in the next, was puffed up with a sort of pride and arrogant satisfaction, to think that I was admitted into such company. ²⁹⁰

The chief value of the many bungling attempts to describe is not their success or failure as descriptions, but the light they shed on the minds of the beholders.

"It is ever a fact that when a great subject is dealt with by the human mind, we get a double lesson; if the mind be competent we get a description of the subject, but in any event we get a portrait of the mind."²⁹¹ So it is in the "physical descriptions" of Niagara, but even more so in the attempt to find meaning in this natural extravagance

²⁸⁹Beaufoy, op. cit., pp. 102-3.

²⁹⁰Hall, op. cit., I, p. 352.

²⁹¹Slicer, op. cit., p. 115.

at the end of the Fashionable Tour.

The internal portrait remains hazy. Confused at both ends -- at both the beginning and the end of their trip -- tourists concluded their descriptions with as little clarity about the meaning of Niagara as they expressed about first impressions. Nevertheless, a discussion of several general impressions suggests some aspects of the meaning this wilderness wonder had for them. A religiousness of language again characterizes these confused images. Even practical William Cooper was at a loss.

The indignant foam and agony roaring which strike the senses of the traveller. . . . prepare his mind for the still sublimer scenes which they announce. . . . Next is the Grandpitch -- before this majestic image the soul is fixed in awe and reverence -- the voice of a companion is irksome -- self is forgot -- full of the idea of Almighty power -- through terrible, delightful -- sense dwells upon the image -- thought wanders obscurely after something which it cannot grasp, and the beholder is lost in ecstasy as I am in description. 292

It may be that the response of "ecstasy" is so unfocussed as to be unavailable for analysis. It may be that the widespread appeal of undifferentiated religiosity is the most concrete observation historians can make on the basis of the evidence, regardless of whether one considers the utterances of pilgrims to be confused pratings or genuine ecstasy. Nevertheless, recognizing that a

292 William Cooper, A Guide in the Wilderness; or a History of the First Settlements in the Western Counties of New York (Dublin: Printed by Gilbert and Hodges, 1810), pp. 28-9.

religiousness of language may reflect more than merely pious sentimentality, I believe we do well to focus on those statements which have some substantive coherence with a theological tradition. A. T. Goodrich verbalized his ecstasy in a recognizable form.

I will remember the works of the Lord.
Thou art the God that doest wonders. The
waters saw thee, O God, the depths were
also troubled, the earth trembled and shook.
Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the
great waters, and thy footsteps are not
known. 293

Orr's amplitude of expression must not distract us from his accurate portrayal of tourist impressions. It

so utterly confounds by its magnitude,
grandeur, and energy, that the tourist
is for a time utterly unable to individualize and appreciate the august and ineffable attributes of this wonderful and glorious work of the Omnipotent Architect, who formed and harmonized its amazing and awful proportions. 294

Orr classifies three religious feelings at Niagara -- and in so doing isolates the principal elements in an "objective" religious iconology of Niagara Falls.

God of Omnipotence! this wonder is Thy
work; the very ground is holy with thy
presence! This you feel -- must feel --
though, perhaps, you do not speak it.
Crowding emotions swell the bosom;
thoughts that defy utterance fill the
mind. The power and presence of the
Almighty seem fearfully manifest. You
gaze, and tremble as you gaze! 295

²⁹³Goodrich, op. cit., pp. 75-6.

²⁹⁴Orr, op. cit., p. 95.

²⁹⁵Ibid., p. 155.

Many tourists capitalized on Orr's generalizations by interpreting Niagara (and other natural wonders to a lesser degree), as God's method of communication with man. Tourists made pilgrimages to these wonders to retreat from the world, for solace from and solitude with God. Frederick Marryat expresses this sentiment most directly. "It is through the elements that the Almighty has ever designed to commune with man, or to execute his supreme will." After a long list of theophanies, including such favorites as burning bushes and divided seas and even less famous ones, such as miscellaneous earthquakes and volcanos, Marryat continues.

It is still through the elements that the Almighty speaks to man, to warn, to terrify, to chasten; to raise him to wonder, to praise, and to adore. . . . [and] to dissolve the union between the body and the soul. . . .it is through these that the Deity still speaks to man; yet what can inspire more awe of him, more reverence, and more love, than the contemplation of thy falling waters, great Niagara! 296

The "elements. . . .speak directly to man" through their grandeur and power in such an overwhelming manner that man can do no other than listen. More devious methods were also employed. The meaning of Niagara was revealed only gradually to some persons -- their enthusiasm grew over a period of time, either after an extended stay at the Falls, or on a second trip to the Falls. Initially, there was a tendency to be suspicious and

296 Marryat, op. cit., p. 113.

defensive about the immediate ecstasy of some tourists by others who preferred to let the meaning of Niagara emerge from and be rooted in an extended acquaintance. These persons emphasized the superficial quality of initial impressions as a device of a God who needed time to woo tourists into a deeper appreciation of Niagara. The quality of appreciation and understanding rose as tourists gave time to their viewing. J. A. Clark's account is characteristic.

I had thought that these falls. . . .
 possessed all the conceivable elements
 of sublimity, but I never understood
 their full grandeur and majesty until
 I looked at them today. . . .I felt
 that the tremendous roar, that rose
 deafening all around me, was the voice
 of God! I saw that it was His hand
 that had gathered these waters, and
 poured them with such resistless force
 over that vast precipice, and the thought
 then flashed upon my mind, 'How will He
 speak to impenitent sinners when he
 riseth up to judgment? How will they
 escape from his mighty hand when he
 poureth his fury like fire? 297

Clark poses these questions with some fear that God's wrath may be His most important weapon for keeping human behavior within respectable bounds. Suddenly a new light is shed, and God's method becomes one of subtle coercion rather than august threat.

Just then the rainbow met my eye that lay
 beautifully pencilled on the foaming
 flood below. I remembered it was the bow
 of promise; and new emotions of gratitude
 were awakened up in my heart, when, at the

²⁹⁷ Clark, op. cit., p. 150.

very moment I was surrounded with such demonstrations of Almighty power, and such vivid proof that God could with the breath of his mouth hurl the guilty down to bottomless perdition, I was reminded by the bow that lay on the bosom of the foaming gulf, that through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, there was a way for poor sinners to escape! Oh that they might be prevailed upon to lay hold of the hope set before them, and not rush madly 298 on to the precipice of eternal death.

Orr takes the analogy even further.

The beautiful rainbow that smiled upon your gaze from the American Fall, now walks by your side, measuring its march by your own pace. When you stop, it stops. when you start, it starts also. If you run, it keeps up with you; if you linger, it waits. Like a guardian angel, it seems to watch your movements, whispering ever Faith, Hope, Heaven; and giving back your glances of regard! But you cannot lure it far away from the Falls; -- it seems to woo your worship to God's most glamorous work, and to melt away in despair when you leave it behind; but when you return, it starts up to welcome you, and seems to delight in your 299 presence.

God was rarely identified with Niagara, even if Orr said that "the very ground is holy with thy presence." Rather, Niagara was a mediator. In contrast to the first mode of communication between God and man, in which God actively "wooed" man, using Niagara as a vehicle, Niagara was envisioned as a window, an open door, an invitation to view God's power in action. In this case, a passive God was not actively wooing, but rather providing occasions for human beings to witness His power, if they chose.

²⁹⁸Ibid.

²⁹⁹Orr, op. cit., p. 127.

John Melish identified Niagara's features as "works" of God.

These are thy glorious works! Parent of Good!
Almighty! Thine this universal frame.
-- These declare
Thy goodness beyond all thought, a power divine.³⁰⁰

Melish concludes with a passage which summarizes this second method of communication between man and God.

". . . .looking through the grand scene to its Almighty Author, I blessed the wonder working God of Heaven."³⁰¹

A third method of communication between God and man exemplified at Niagara may be generally labelled as transcendentalist. While Richard Cobden thanked a "God that has bestowed on me health, time and means for reaching [Niagara] and the spirit to kindle at the spectacle before me," Margaret Fuller assumed that the spirit was in place, and was illuminated not through the majesties of Niagara, but rather her own spirit. Her source of significance was not Niagara per se, but rather the light that fell from the mysterious and sacred center of her own soul. This is not to suggest that she rejected the presence of God, but only that her understanding of Niagara was not mediated through God, but rather through her soul. God remained transcendent -- worship of Niagara itself was inappropriate, even though it was a proper place to worship. She kept her God properly at a distance. "Then arose in

³⁰⁰ Melish, op. cit., p. 320.

³⁰¹ Ibid., p. 321.

my breast a genuine admiration, and a humble adoration of the Being who was the architect of this and all." The sight for her had been a "manifestation of the Eternal," but the separation between Niagara and God, so blurred by many tourists, remained intact.³⁰²

Margaret Fuller considered Niagara to be a magnificent "manifestation of the Eternal." Others used the term "emblem" to emphasize the various aspects of God all made manifest in one natural wonder. Emblems are, after all, summaries or symbols of experience. Orr's guidebook, a potpourri of images and language, provides one example.

Around the Falls all is soft, yet exciting -- the cataract itself terrible, yet attractive. It has a fearful, yet fascinating beauty, a dreadful but alluring greatness. Apt emblem of Divinity! it awes while it invites -- and while it commands reverence, it secures affection. Nature, as if by a revelation of her beauty and majesty, to teach us a religion in which justice is softened by mercy, and authority sweetened by love, has here concentrated her powers of thrilling and exciting, and gathered round one holy spot of earth all that can awe and terrify, with all that inspires and delights.³⁰³

By putting together many images in one, Orr stretches his credibility as a reliable interpreter, but it is clear that he was in the mainstream of thinking about Niagara.

Dixon suggested that

it is rather as if nature had sat in council with herself to create a living embodiment of her utmost power, sovereign glory, irresistible force, rapid motion; and then thrown around the representation of her

³⁰²Margaret Fuller, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 13.

³⁰³Orr, op. cit., pp. 22-3.

visible symbol. . . .a covering of
 exquisite, and inexpressible, beauty.
 [And] there this living monument stands,
 a glorious emblem of the majesty of God. 304

Dixon wished to emphasize the tentativeness and incompleteness of any manifestations of God on earth. Niagara could not represent God's total majesty and power. Rather, Niagara was only a hint of God's power and majesty, just as emblems only suggest what they symbolize.

God has left, in all his dominion and works, space for imagination. Everything has its mystery, -- nothing its limits. Niagara stands a mystic creation, defying the admeasurements of the human intellect. But He welcomes all who approach to indulge the feelings of admiration, wonder, awe; -- and by the eternal roar of his glorious music, he sends up sounds of adoration to God, and challenges for his Creator the homage of all hearts. 305

Niagara as mediator, emblem, temple, altar. A final grouping of images identified Niagara as a sanctuary and a "holy spot." Margaret Fuller was in the minority in suggesting that her feelings of unworthiness arose from a reluctance to "enter this temple which nature has erected to its God."³⁰⁶ Most boldly entered the temple which they thought God both erected and inhabited! The religiosity which went along with it was that to which the pilgrims were accustomed. On September 14, 1840, "at least fifty worshippers of Niagara sat down together to break

³⁰⁴Dixon, op. cit., p. 120.

³⁰⁵Ibid.

³⁰⁶Fuller, op. cit., II, p. 11.

their fast."³⁰⁷ Orr could not understand why any "man or woman possessing leisure and means, would not desire to visit Niagara, if but to pay homage of a day's admiration at this altar and type of the Eternal."³⁰⁸

Niagara -- the "august throne upon which Nature sits, clothed in glorious attributes of power and beauty! -- the everlasting altar, at whose cloudwrapt base the elements pay homage to Omnipotence!"³⁰⁹ In his not so unique guidebook way, Orr prodded people into experiences while reflecting the general sentiment of the day. His popularity was partly a product of his uncanny ability to use both his own feelings and those which emerged from the potpourri of prose and poetry of his fellow Niagara admirers.³¹⁰ As he leads the prospective or the actual tourist in exploring Niagara, he predicts and reflects the feelings of tourists.

You are in the nave of a vast temple, whose walls are the eternal hills, corniced with crags, ornamented with a fret-work of trees, shrubs, flowers, and foliage; whose dome is the blue heaven; and whose altar is the mighty cataract, draped with hangings of green; from the unseen base of which clouds of incense are ascending to the skies, and bearing up the solemn peal of its mist-hidden thunder-tones organ. The floor is of emerald and alabaster; elements are the ministers, and you are a worshipper.

³⁰⁷Augustus C. Murray, op. cit., p. 280.

³⁰⁸Orr, op. cit., pp. 23-4.

³⁰⁹Ibid., p. 17.

³¹⁰The same might be said for Nathaniel Parker Willis at Trenton Falls.

This temple was the work of Nature, and to the God of Nature erected. Human hands could not lift even a corner of its veil; human art could not equal the smallest of its marvels; human eyes could not penetrate the least of its mysteries. 311

At a further spot in this "nave of the vast temple," Orr finds yet another way to express a similar sentiment.

What a moment is this! . . . You seem all eyes, all ears, all soul! You are in the sublime sanctuary of Nature; her wonderful and fearful mysteries are above, beneath, and around you. God is infinite, you are nothing. This is His temple, you are His worshippers! It is impossible in such a place to be irreverent. The proudest here is meek; the haughtiest, humble; and the loftiest, lowly. The sights and sounds that crowd upon your gaze and fill your ears, will be remembered to the last of your life. 312

In a society where "evidence addressed to the understanding" was a predominant form of theological justification and religious dialogue, the "evidence addressed to the senses," as provided at Niagara Falls, was received with excitement and enthusiasm. In fact, people sought proof of God's Omnipotence in a place such as Niagara because it was more direct and obvious than in lesser wonders. Niagara was not unique proof of God's omnipotence, but it was the most convincing available.

There is no object in nature, in which the poetic, the reflecting or the pious mind will not trace the hand of the Divine Author, as well as in the wee modest crimson-tipped daisy, or the love-torch

³¹¹Orr, op. cit., p. 151.

³¹²Ibid., p. 139.

of the glow-worm as in the ocean or the starlit sky; but here [at Niagara Falls] the dullest spirit must be stirred, the most thoughtless and careless be arrested, the most daring and haughty humbled; he feels like Moses, that he 'put his shoes from off his feet;' he feels as if admitted to a secret abode and dwelling place of the Deity, who speaks to him in a terrible whisper. 313

Niagara drew a response of sentimental religiosity -- it was the common man's wonder. Visitors from overseas could now answer in the affirmative to the "first and all important question" which met tourists returning from the New World, "Have you seen Niagara?" But more important, tourists sought and found at Niagara a mystery and a majesty which answered their highest aspirations, which evoked a predictable response -- kindling a spiritual ecstasy of emotion. A place where the "God of the universe [was] felt to be almost visibly present,"³¹⁴ a place where the soul "clings with a likeness of religious faith,"³¹⁵ where "awe. . . . [is] softened into love, and affection is elevated into reverence," Niagara must take its place as one of the key religious shrines of early nineteenth century America.

³¹³Charles A. Murray, op. cit., p. 68.

³¹⁴Orr, op. cit., p. 130.

³¹⁵Ibid., pp. 95-96.

ILLUSTRATIONS

(The illustrations are numbered in the lower right hand corner.)

1. "Catskill Mountain House" from Charles Rockwell, The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around (New York: Tainter Brothers and Company, 1867). This image appears opposite the title page.
2. "Catskill Mountain House" from Charles Rockwell, The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around (New York: Tainter Brothers and Company, 1867). This image appears opposite page 21.
3. "Catskill Mountain House" from John W. Barber, Historical Collections of the State of New York (New York: S. Tuttle, 1841), p. 110. This image is included in a description of Greene County and appears in other places in other editions.
4. "Cauterskill Falls" from Charles Rockwell, The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around (New York: Tainter Brothers and Company, 1867). This image appears opposite page 123.
5. "High Fall" from Nathaniel Parker Willis, Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851). High Fall(s) was one of several falls at Trenton Falls.
6. "Part of High Falls" from Nathaniel Parker Willis, Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851).
7. "High Falls" from Nathaniel Parker Willis, Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851).
8. "Sherman Fall" from Nathaniel Parker Willis, Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851).
9. "Rocky Heart" from Nathaniel Parker Willis, Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851). Rocky Heart was a part of Trenton Falls.
10. "Trenton Falls, at Trenton" from John W. Barber, Historical Collections of the State of New York (New York: S. Tuttle, 1841), p. 242. This image is included in a description of Oneida County and appears in other places in other editions.
11. "Hotel, 1851" from Nathaniel Parker Willis, Trenton

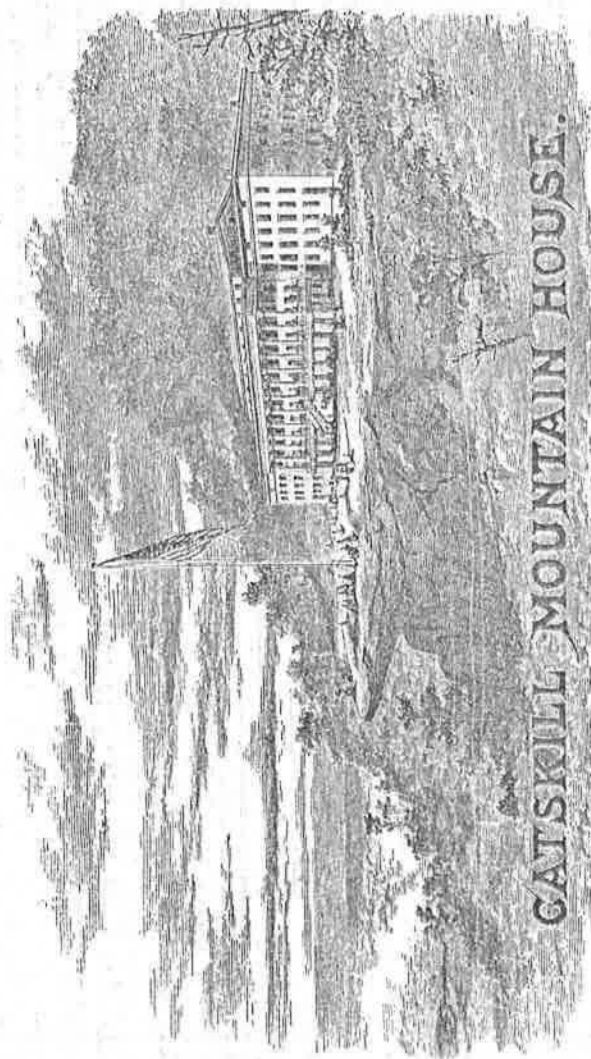
Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851).

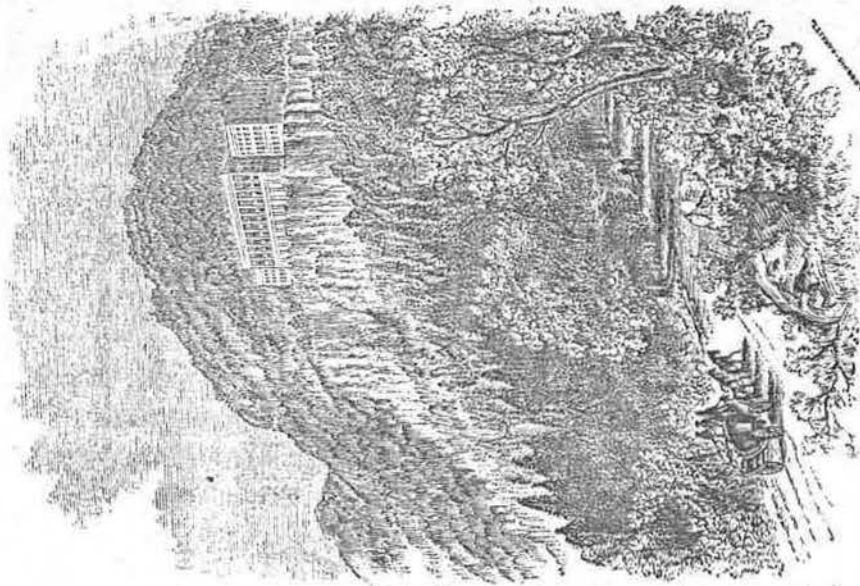
12. "Taghcanic or Goodwin's Falls, Ulysses" from John W. Barber, Historical Collections of the State of New York (New York: S. Tuttle, 1844), p. 554. This image is included in a description of Tompkins County and appears in other places in other editions.

13. "Niagara Falls, From Canada, Near the Clifton House" from Samuel DeVeaux, Traveller's Own Book to Saratoga Springs, Niagara Falls and Canada (Buffalo: Faxon and Read, 1841). This image appears opposite page 223.

14. "Horseshoe Falls, From Goat Island" from Steele's Book of Niagara Falls (Buffalo: Oliver G. Steele, 1847). This image appeared in many of the guidebooks published by Oliver G. Steele.

15. "Niagara Falls" from Frederick Marryat, Diary in America (New York: Knopf, 1962), opposite page 110. This Borzoi edition is based on the original 1839 edition.





CATSKILL MOUNTAIN HOUSE.

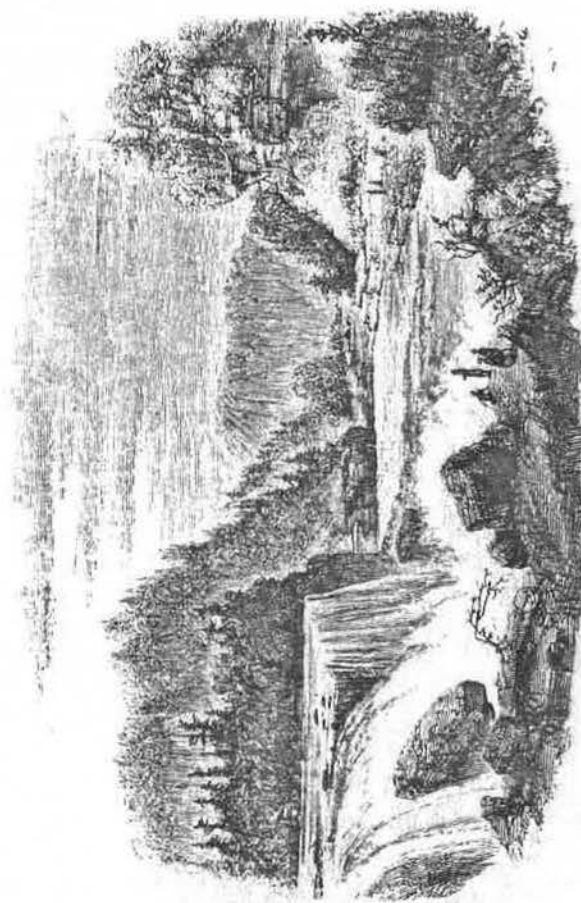
2.

*Catskill Mountain House.*

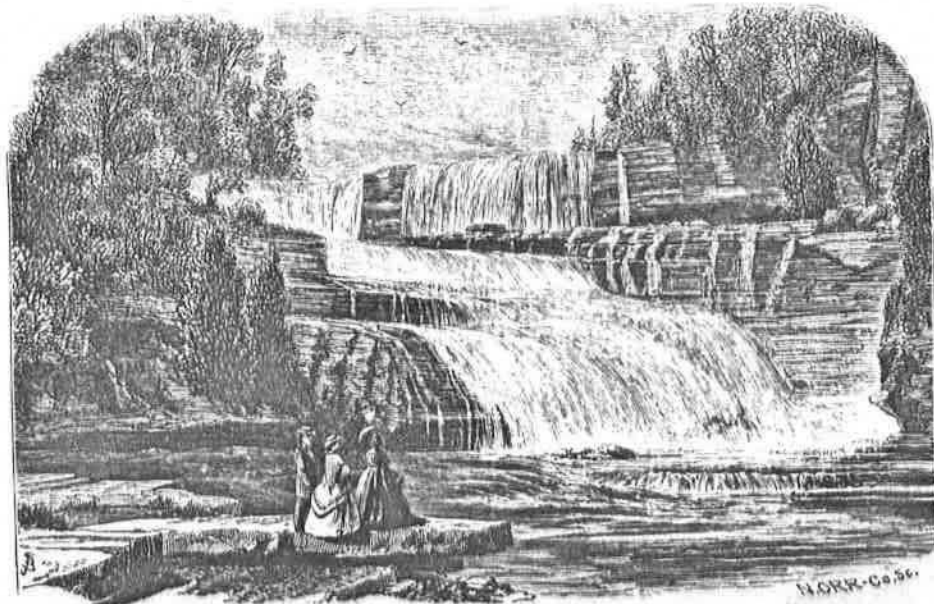
3.



CAUTERSKILL FALLS.

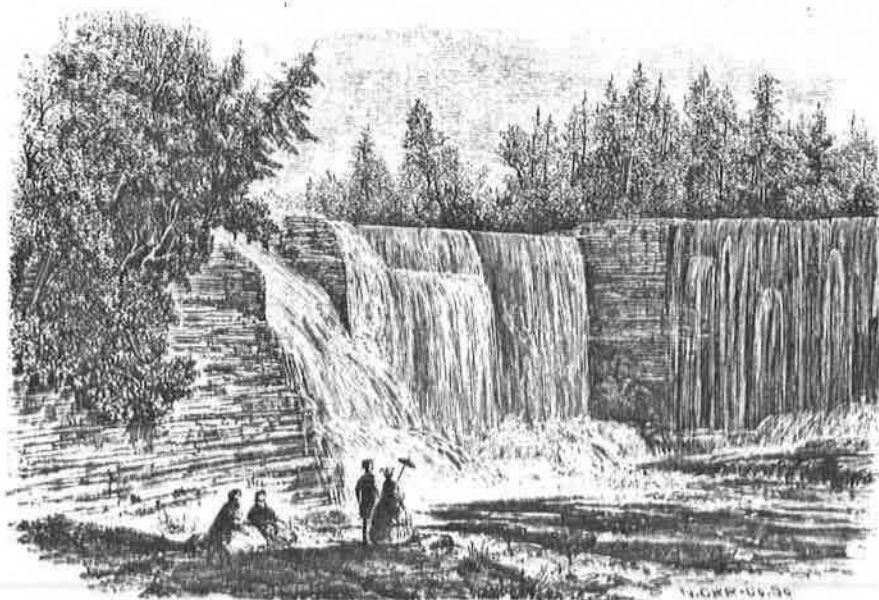


Hear Fall.



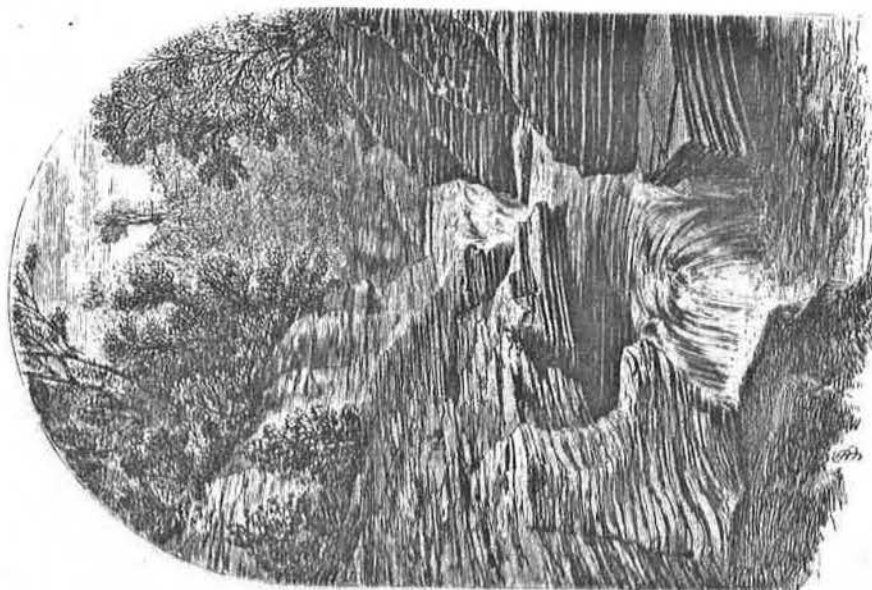
HIGH FALLS.

7.



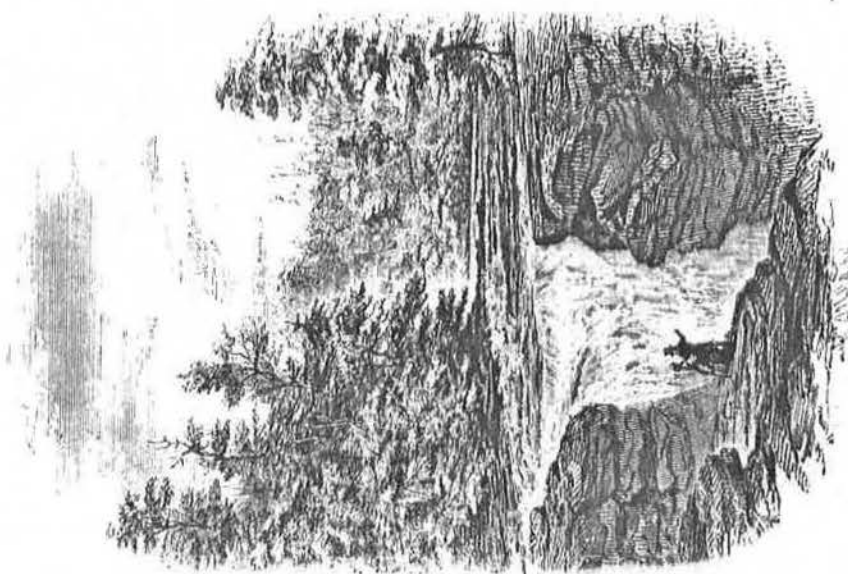
PART OF HIGH FALLS.

6.



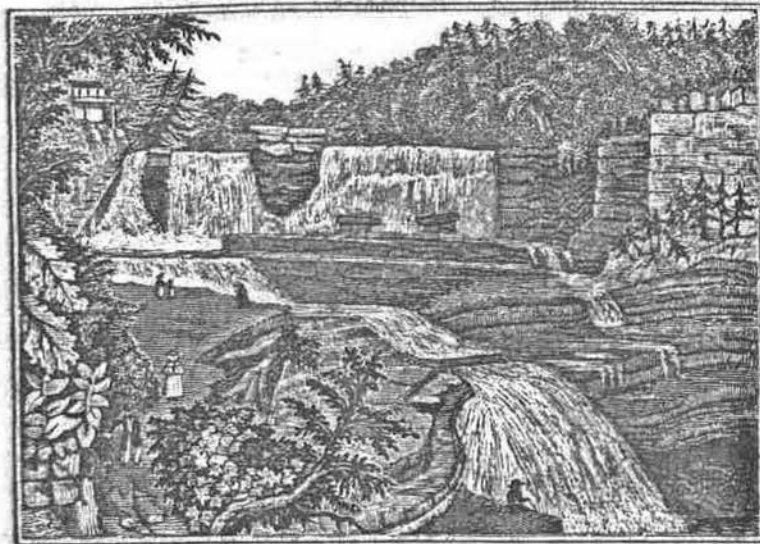
ROCKY HEART.

9.



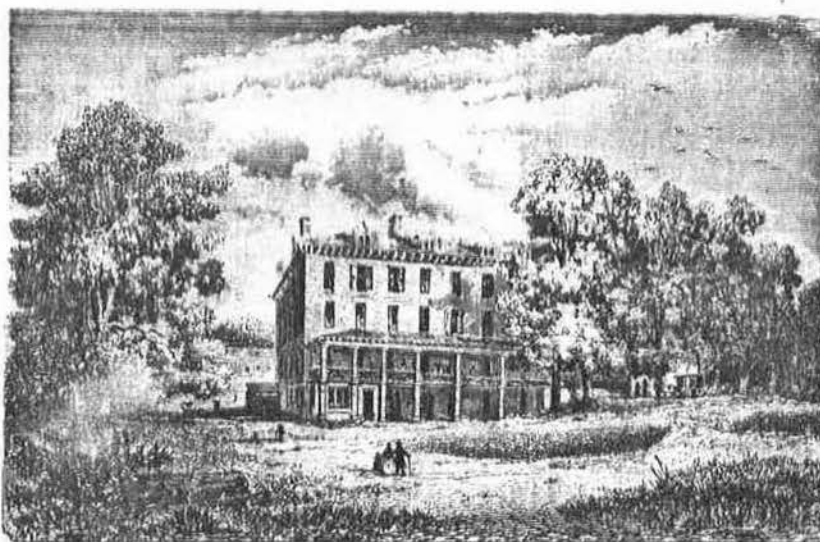
SHEPHERD FALL.

8.



Trenton Falls, at Trenton.

10.



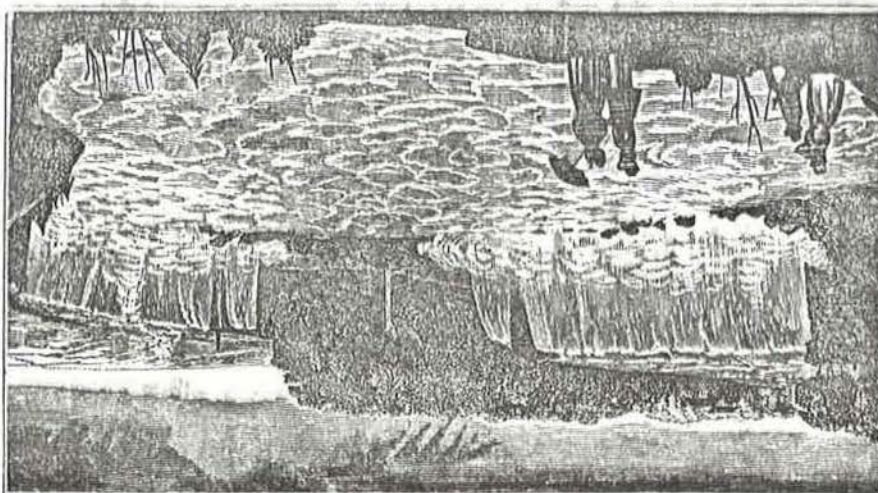
HOTEL, 1861.

11.



Taghcanic or Goodwin's Falls, Ulysses.

NIAGARA FALLS, FROM CANADA, NEAR THE CLIFTON HOUSE.

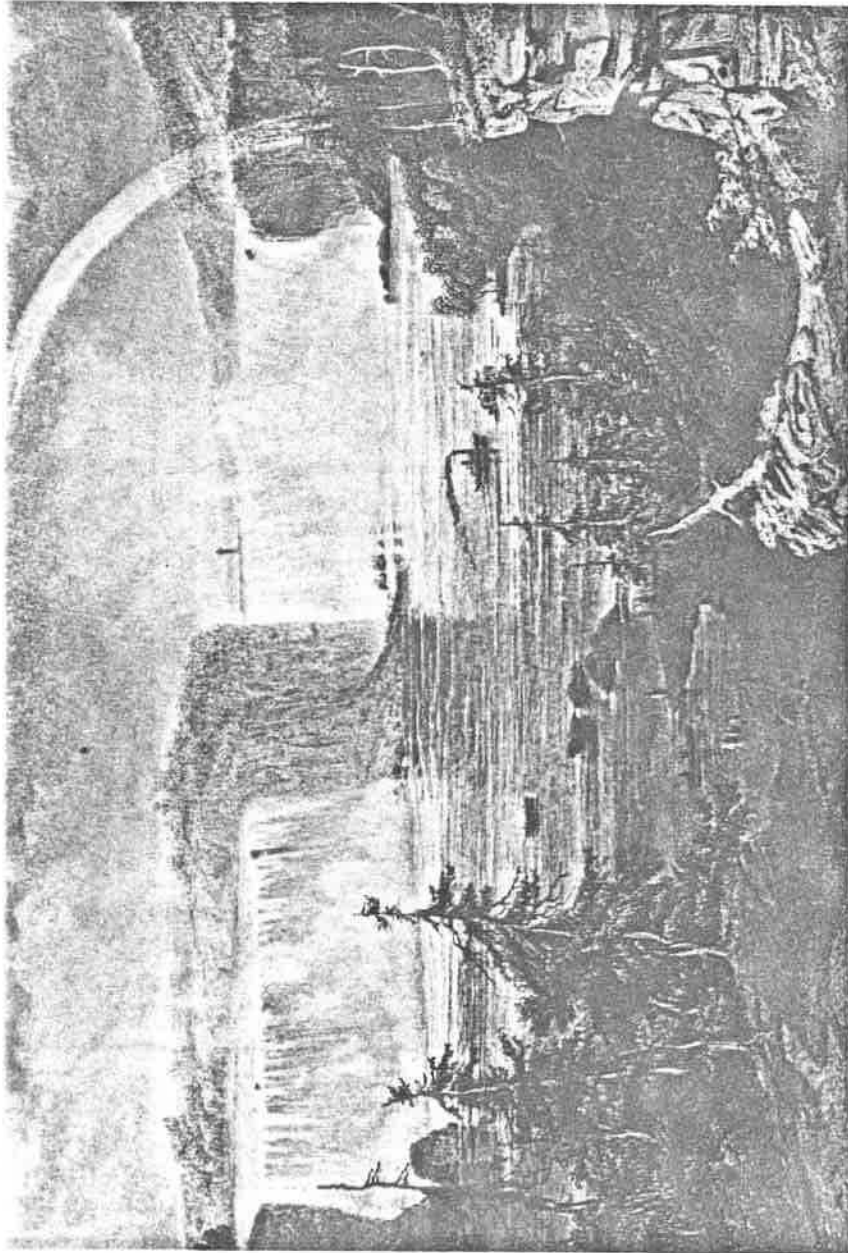


13.



14.

Horseshoe Falls, From Goat Island



NIAGARA FALLS.

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